









I Believe in God

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# I Believe in God

A Meditation on the Apostles' Creed

**Paul Claudel**

Edited by Agnès du Sarment

Translated by Helen Weaver

Introduction by Henri de Lubac, S.J.



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# Introduction

ON THE THRESHOLD of an exposition of the Credo, any preface of a literary nature would be unsuitable. It is not certain, moreover, that from the standpoint of literature the present collection greatly serves the reputation of Claudel. The passages are often too fragmentary—or too long—to preserve the essential harmonies, and their selection too lax to invite comparison with those *Perles Noires* in which Father André Blanchet recently revealed to us an almost new Claudel. Not that the reader susceptible to the beauty of words and images will not find occasion in

these pages to savor some rare delights—all the more unexpected, perhaps, because a large number of the texts draw on less familiar, less celebrated, works than is usual.

A certain prejudice—and not on the part of nonbelievers alone—has caused a neglect, even by ardent Claudelians, of certain writings said to be the works of his old age but which, in fact, were begun very early, and in which the poet has confided to us a portion of his lifelong meditation on the Holy Scriptures. And yet these works overflow with riches; a new lyricism emerges, nourished by the symbolism of the Bible.

But the rediscovery of such poetry was not the consideration which prompted Agnès du Sarment, who gathered these texts and arranged them in the order of the Credo. Her criterion has not been an artistic one, and many passages, even some with the most profound religious overtones, have had to be discarded in order to carry out a rigorously circumscribed design. Her intention was to realize the poet's most cherished desire by placing his work directly in the service (to borrow the phrase of the great St. Gregory, who was one of Claudel's most beloved mentors) of the "construction of the faith."

Let us not separate the poet from the believer. Even in the order of belief, this poet has a great deal to give us. Let us not assume that his role consists only of adorning with the beauty of his words the teachings he has received from the masters of doctrine. This would give us a very false and shabby idea of Claudel as a poet. Granted he was only a layman whose profession was not a theological one. Moreover, he was anxious to be the submissive son of "that great Mother at whose knee he learned everything he knew." Not for a moment would he seek to refine the divine truth with which Mother Church sustained him, in order to extract some sort of truth of his own to set himself apart from simple and humble believers.

Thus this book, made up of his reflections, will give us no more, essentially—and herein lies its value—than the common faith. But the simplest and humblest believer would be untrue to his Christian vocation if he did not accept this divine truth as his sustenance. If he has received this gift, the truth which lives and germinates within him will bear its fruit outwardly for the good of his fellow men.

The poet's contribution to this process can be of greater significance than one might suspect. Divine truth, by the very reason of its transcendence, has great need, in its formulation, of help from the imagination. "This was the motive of the Eternal Wisdom which, having itself become flesh, has spoken to us only in parables, not availing itself of reason, but teaching us the language of those things around us which from the day of their creation have never ceased to speak." (p. 289)

It is this same inexhaustible language which the poet, enlightened by his faith, continues to decipher in order to find new correspondences. There is also, like the drapery which is unfolded at length in Rubens' *Descent from the Cross*, "that boundless stream of light, that multiple cataract of prophecies, analogies, and proofs, surrounding the figure of the Redeemer, that shroud from which it is being released" (p. 120)—the Holy Scriptures. If it is the business of scholars to expound the meaning of the Scriptures, there still remains that "mass of allusions and faint echoes" (p. 20) which the poet will be better able to catch than the various ranks of the learned.

This role is a traditional one for the poet; perhaps the case of Claudel brings home to us today its redoubled importance. Because theological learning has become of necessity extremely rational and analytical in its methods, it has great trouble holding in its nets (let alone putting to use) the themes of our traditional faith. It is possible, for example, that only the poet would have dared make that analogy which evokes so vividly the relationship between the Church and the Christian soul, as it has been celebrated by the long line of religious commentators on the CANTICLE OF CANTICLES: "Just as the body of Christ exists whole in every portion of the host, so the whole Church is behind the individual countenance of every Christian." (p. 185)

Think, too, of the great theme of the Word of God, the one and only Word, which was transmitted to the prophets and which reveals itself in the son of Mary: the written Word and the Word made flesh, *Verbum disseminatum et coadunatum . . .* Behold it revealed to us on the cross, at the joining of the two Testaments, "spread open before us, for us to read at sight." (p. 106) What a wealth of material is there for scriptural theology!

And let us not overlook still another great theme, that of the

mystical identity of the Virgin Mary and the Church. It recurs again and again in Claudel because it is this that possessed him on the day of his conversion under the vaults of Notre Dame. (P. 206) These two themes intertwine, fertilize each other, and bring forth offspring, as it were, until we see Mary, at the hour when she sings the *Magnificat*, appearing as a "living Bible"—she who is "the support of the Word, the stem of that sun which illuminates the world with the radiance of words which do not pass away." (P. 93)

What accounts for the strength, as well as the fertility, of these insights is that they never arise from a superfluous invention or a search for originality. However casual may be their apparent means of support, their roots are deep. Even in his most imaginative flights, Claudel remains true to that fundamental objectivity which in theological language is called, after St. Paul, "the analogy of faith." He does not pretend to be a scholar, any more than he pretends to be a theologian. But he has read some of the essential authors, either in their original texts or in excerpts. Through St. Augustine and St. Gregory, through the good rhapsodist Raban Maur and the fiery Rupert, he has assimilated the patristic tradition.

Some of his most valuable interpretations of doctrine, such as that of the Transfiguration (p. 65), and some of his most penetrating reflections, such as that on "the Heart of God and His fatherly bowels" (p. 15), seem to have come to him directly from Origen. Occasional readers have complained that he made a pastiche from ancient commentaries and that in moments of lesser inspiration, he found the biblical concordance more useful than the text itself. But there are many fortunate strokes, true discoveries, which he owes to his familiarity with the Fathers. Many pages in his work combine traditional thought with the most personal of idioms, forming a unique blend which from now on will be a part of the treasury of an ever-growing Tradition.

It will be seen, moreover, that Claudel, no matter how much a poet he is, knows how to give clear answers to precise questions when this is needed for the clarification of his faith. He was a careful student of St. Thomas, as well as of the Fathers. If we look closely, for instance, at what he repeatedly says about the resurrection of the body, we cannot fail to notice that he has his

own theory on the subject, a very different one from the childish representations so readily attributed to us, a theory firmly grounded on the affirmation of the Credo, and further developed by the contemplation of certain Scriptural texts, his poetic imagination, and an open-eyed consideration of the conditions of our present existence in the body. (pp. 285, 287, 288, 294) Next, let us examine the metaphor of the seventh article, "seated at the right hand of the Father": we will soon find ourselves transported into the realm of the deepest mystery, that of the union of God and man in the very bosom of the Trinity. (p. 145) Or again, in view of the state of disorder of the world today, let us consider the origin of evil: he manages in three lines, and without denying himself a play on words, to throw into startling relief the drama of temptation and to illuminate the depths of the metaphor. He assigns the motive for the fall (and it is the most classic of answers) to "that original separation from God in which the creature delights," and then he shows Lucifer, who "breathes—no, I should say he hisses<sup>1</sup>—within all creatures the spirit which he drew from the very mouth of God. He invites them to live their own existence." (p. 136)

It will also be seen that Claudel's Christian traditionalism in no way makes him a man chained to the past. The very word tradition is often misunderstood. It is carelessly applied, with its ordinary human connotations, to questions of faith, having no regard for necessary transpositions. Accordingly, an attachment to tradition is regarded with suspicion as a kind of slavery. This is far from the truth.

For the Christian, attachment to tradition means first and foremost a deep-seated attachment to that divine element which entered our history once and for all, and which never ceases to move therein. It means being true to the Holy Spirit, being open to its inspiration. It means the promise of perpetual renewal. This had already been stated by the first great doctor of the Catholic tradition, St. Irenaeus.

Tradition is a criterion for distinguishing not only between the true and the false but between the essential and the adventitious, between unchanging dogma and that portion of the explications

<sup>1</sup> In the original, there is a pun on the words *souffler* (breathe) and *stifler* (hiss)—Trans.

and representations which is more or less a by-product of the learning of a given age. At the same time, tradition is a force which liberates us from all that has become irrelevant in the forms of the past, and which encourages and guides new syntheses. From this point of view, the coming together of the poet and the believer in Claudel has great value. One of the peculiarities of his poetic intuition was to place him in a state of sympathetic vibration with the living forces of his time—even when, in order to oppose more energetically whatever was, or seemed to him, to be deviation, he sometimes affected a sort of heavily obstinate refusal to understand. The Claudelian dynamism is joined by a thousand antennae to the great movement of contemporary science which culminates in the generalized theory of evolution.

But the poet does not usurp the role of the scientist, any more than he does that of the theologian or the scholar. He goes about his work as a poet should: he invents a myth. It is the myth of Prâkriti. Nature, personified as Prâkriti, has received from the Creator the “order” for this human universe. We discover her in her vast “workshop,” first devoting herself to “study,” then beginning to turn out one experiment after another, many of which are failures. She “falls prey to all the abuses of industrial production,” but eventually the creatures she manufactures begin to “compete” with each other; progress is discernible, and “one finishes what another started.” At last the day comes when the “finishing touches” are given, and with everything now prepared “for man’s use, to his scale, and in his image,” man “finally severs himself from the earth” and “definitively assumes his stature as a child of God.” Biological evolution is at an end.

The universe has not become static, however, nor has its movement been reduced to mere periodic rotation or exchange of life: it pursues its forward course, “always in a state of creation” (p. 7), “a stream which carries us along with all the rest toward the final composition.”<sup>2</sup> Let us emphasize this magnificent phrase, “*toward the final composition*.”

Must we not hail here the meaning of the poet and the scientist, Claudel and Teilhard de Chardin, so dissimilar, and yet both equally possessed by the fullness of a single vision which,

<sup>2</sup> That is, chemical composition.—*Trans.*

far from threatening their faith, serves rather to exalt it? "Creation has never ceased. . . . It continues today, and the world is constantly emerging a little further from chaos. Through the great restlessness of creatures, something is always being done," and each of us, part of a vast progression of increasing complexity, collaborates in the "completion of the world." We should not fail to realize, as Monsignor Bruno de Solages, one of the best interpreters of Teilhard pointed out, that in such a setting revelation "is more at home than in that of the cyclical universe where, for so many centuries, theologians have been accustomed to place it."

As for revelation itself, Claudel knows that when it comes to us, "we have no choice but to accept and absorb." (p. 10) But he makes no mistake about the nature of this essential passivity. He does not suppose that in this acceptance and absorption the intelligence must not come into active play. From the beginning and down through the ages, he sees it at work, whether in the act of believing or in the formulation of what it believes. He accepts each article of the Credo as "a fact" (p. 10), but at the same time he realizes that Christianity, unlike other creeds, consists "less in a body of affirmations which impose themselves on the world than in the personality of the man who came to bring them to us." (p. 140) Now this man is Jesus, the Man-God, and one of the characteristics of divinity is to be hidden. What would his disciples make of a formula which would proclaim His divinity as a "ready-made" truth? What meaning would it have for them? He will, therefore, strive to "elicit it, to draw it forth" from the very depths of their souls. "When the time has come to found His Church, it is from herself . . . out of this assent, this good will of the creature towards his Creator, that He will draw the necessary confession." (p. 56)

Thus, while it is indeed Jesus who reveals, who is revealed, it is Peter who believes and who, in the very act of answering Jesus' question, finds, under the inspiration of the Father, the first canon of faith. This is the nucleus, the core around which will be gathered and organized all the other formulae which make up that universe of dogma which, like the other universe, lives and grows within that sphere where the Word is now and forever contained; and for this work the co-operation of man, responding to divine revelation, is still of vital importance. But the commentary would

be endless which attempted to expound all that the poet compresses in a few vivid sentences:

When in my village church I hear the Credo being recited, one article after another, by the harsh voice of the soloist, to which the naïve whine of the little girls responds, I tremble with an inner ecstasy; it seems to me that I am present at the creation of the world. I know the cost of each one of those formulae printed in eternal truth—with what rending of heaven and earth, what rivers of blood, by what effort, what mental travail, and with what overflowing Grace they came to be born. I see those great masses of dogma emerge and take form before my eyes one after the other; I see man struggling painfully and finally succeeding in tearing out of his own heart the final affirmation. It is like a cathedral, immovable and yet advancing with all its columns from porch to choir. (p. 9)

This notion of man's active role in the reception and dissemination of the gift of God is central to Claudel's belief, and it can be seen in other images as well. One of the most curious, which recurs frequently in his work, is provided by a free interpretation of the drama of the Pentecost. He has his own way of explaining the symbolism of the tongues of fire. The action of God on the soul is often compared in Scripture to that of fire. (p. 162) The primordial fire of the Pentecost is indeed that of the Holy Spirit; it is this divine fire which transforms the twelve Apostles into "inextinguishable torches." But how? What "suddenly broke forth over their heads on that holy day was the emanation of their own souls which, having achieved a supreme state of vibration, burst into flames at the touch of the divine spark." (p. 162) And if this fire is experienced as a clap of thunder, the lightning which accompanies it does not fall from heaven, it returns there: it is the Virgin who, joining together these tongues of fire which emanate from the Twelve like so many glowing filaments, fashions them into a "single bolt" which she sends toward "heaven in a flaming spiral." (p. 167)

Are we to conclude from this that Claudel secretly leans toward a form of humanism which would reduce the role of divine action in order to emphasize our own? Must we fear, or allow

others to hope, that transcendence is being threatened by immanence, that the supernatural is being insidiously preyed on by the worm of naturalism? There could be no grosser misinterpretation of the facts. In a word, Claudel is Catholic. Every page of his work reveals that spirit of synthesis which is the very essence of Catholicism. He contemplates God through the medium of His creation at whose multiform beauty he marvels. Just as he admires the material world, and just as the starry field of the heavens inspires from him a hymn in the style of the Psalmist (pp. 43, 44), so he admires man, that sublime creature whom, the Bible tells us, God clothed in glory and honor. (pp. 39, 40)

In God, our Creator and Saviour, he recognizes not only a Power over us, but also a Source which bursts forth within us, a source of fire and water. (p. 166) For God created us in His image, and, buried deep in the vilest human being, this image never ceases to shine. "Every living man is a temple" (p. 188), and if we know how to listen, we can hear within ourselves "that uninterrupted bass" which is the voice of Eternity itself, "the prompting murmur of that ocean where the verses of the Bible break one over the other, like giant waves endlessly stirred and lifted by the breath of the Holy Spirit." (p. 287)

No, the truths are in no way diminished, the Credo is in no sense weakened. But each of its articles is a nectar distilled and pregnant with "light, love, power, and joy." (p. 10) Even the mystery of sin and its bloody redemption obliges us to rejoice: the whole of it may be contemplated in that spear thrust which went beyond the heart of Christ on the cross, which "opened God," which "pierced the very bosom of the Trinity," introducing into it a new element, that "wound" of mercy and that promise of the indissoluble partnership of man in the rhythm and life of the Trinity. (pp. 118, 145)

The Church, which preserves intact for us the riches of dogma, is herself a "vast treasury of joy and beauty!" (p. 179) The true Catholic is not a creature alone or afraid; he feels "at home in the whole universe, he is the nucleus of a certain circle which accompanies him wherever he goes. He is a center of composition." (p. 188)

Composition—we meet again that word that was used before to indicate the direction of biological evolution. From order to

order there is correspondence. Claudel is more sensitive to analogies than to differences; this is indeed part of his function as a poet, which is to apprehend reality through signs. His realism is not, however, founded on illusion. The ultimate answer of the Church to the terrible questions which the world constantly asks must inevitably be that of Jesus: "only with the cross"; our promised destiny is "travail, anguish, strife, and childbirth." (p. 196) But by the same token, is it not the Church alone which, "by fixing forever out of our reach the heavenly ideal to which we must conform . . . has cured us forever of complacency and satisfaction" (p. 196), those enemies of joy? In this way we are prevented from settling down. By preserving Jesus Christ she keeps ever open for us the "pathway between God and man." (p. 286) This is why the Catholic is carried away with "the urge to sing."

"Let us hearken to this Church within us, of us, which is in the act of giving birth to something everlasting." (p. 197) Let us lend an ear to this muffled roar: it seems at first to be in the distance, but it is at hand; "it is an inexorable sea which lifts, floods, and submerges all." (p. 296) It is the very voice of Being: "There is no longer anything but Being, there is nothing stronger than this summons from the perfect to the imperfect, which we call Love. . . ."

"All things die, but they die in God." (p. 286)

Toward the end of his life, Claudel was still nursing a number of projects. He wished to devote a study to St. Paul. In imitation of the venerable authors who had initiated him into the Bible, he wished to compile a book of sermons. He used to say humorously that this would be his revenge for all the bad sermons to which he had been obliged to listen.

This innocent desire for revenge took yet other forms in the case of other offenders. One day, when he was visiting a convent library, having paused before the shelves of scriptural exegesis, he selected the largest volume, took it in his two hands, brandished it, and exclaimed with appropriate gestures, "Someday I'd like to put all my commentaries on the Bible into a book like this one, and throw it in the face of my century!"

Actually his intentions were less aggressive. His literary invectives and the provocative attitudes he occasionally adopted, not without malice, should not make us forget that he was more

likely to imitate the gesture of the good Samaritan or even of the good Shepherd. There was no spiritual distress which left him cold. His published correspondence can be misleading in that here he addresses himself to writers, to famous men. It represents only a small proportion of similar letters which he poured forth from one end of his life to the other and of which the majority will doubtless never be known. These letters generally found their mark. The book which follows would like to continue their work.

HENRI DE LUBAC, s.j.



# Foreword

THIS WORK IS NOT a collection of *morceaux choisis*: that is, a book one opens at random, usually at the same page, for a momentary diversion, with that minimum effort of attention which is favored by the brevity of the texts.

This book is a paean, a poetic statement of faith, presented in a form accessible to all, having a solidly constructed groundwork and resting on the twelve columns of the Christian faith, columns of indestructible granite: the twelve articles of the Catholic *Credo*.

which Claudel affirmed with an unshakable conviction throughout the thirty-odd prose works whose riches we have plundered.

Let us understand clearly from the outset that, strictly speaking, no one can "enrich" the doctrine as it has been given to us, but we are free to develop and to comment on it. To do so is the work of theologians and thinkers, and it is also the work of poets who, by means of their intuition and the resources of their art, are able to translate into beauty what would, for the general public, be dry and barren theory.<sup>1</sup>

Claudel is that deeply Christian poet who meditated at length on what the Church taught him and who, filled with ecstasy, chose to celebrate his faith, his hope, and his love. But this song of love, which we present here, is orderly, with a clearly determined direction. In addition to the direction provided by the Church in the wording of its Credo, we have, in each of these twelve articles, carefully sought a line of direction, sometimes very subtle, a gradual development in Claudel's thinking, with the result that each forms a little treatise in itself.

That these treatises contain lacunae is inevitable because Claudel was not writing as a professional theologian, following the strict method required of a manual, but as a poet, following the drift of his inspiration, which was often very impulsive. Then too, certain articles are covered more amply than others. When Claudel was working on his giant compendium of over six thousand pages, it did not occur to him that someone would come after him to catalogue and label them. We have tried to handle this labeling discreetly, indicating briefly now and then the essential idea. (We are speaking now of the subtitles which are not, for the most part, Claudel's own.)

It is therefore indispensable, if one wishes to follow the development of his thought and take full advantage of the incomparable riches contained therein, to read this book from the be-

<sup>1</sup> Although second to theology, art and literature play an important role in the propagation of the faith. The Church knows the persuasive power of a beautiful poem, an oratorio, a Gregorian chant, or an icon, and she encourages artists and writers to embellish her doctrinal heritage with their works. Has she not incorporated into her liturgy poems of great lyric beauty such as the *Victimae paschali*, the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, and the *Dies irae*, as pure jewels of faith as well as of literature? A living testimony of Christianity is imparted by the Triptych of the Mystic Lamb, the dome of St. Peter's in Rome, and *The Satin Slipper*.

ginning and not to overlook the introductions provided to this end. In this way we would like to eliminate once and for all the prejudice that claims Claudel is a difficult or incomprehensible author, and that maintains his biblical commentaries are not within the grasp of the uninitiated. Only let the reader open these pages, and he will be captivated at once by the profundity of thought, the enthusiastic faith, the fine sense of wonder, the fresh, unexpected, and vivid images, occasionally tinged with a delightful humor which is unforgettable.

Since this book is intended for the general public, we have thought it advisable to give at the beginning of each division a very brief statement of doctrine, based on the *Summa* of St. Thomas and the Catechism of the Council of Trent. This is followed by a few explanatory words pointing out the relation of this theology to Claudel's poetry. We are concerned in this book only with prose works, those which are least familiar and whose riches we would like to suggest to the hesitant reader. After reading these excerpts, let him go directly to *Les Aventures de Sophie*, *Un Poète regarde la Croix*, *La Rose et le Rosaire*, and *L'Epée et le Miroir*, to name only the most accessible. It will be seen what a wealth of treasure is contained in these masterly works, represented here only by small coin.

Claudel sometimes frightens readers with his cosmic dimensions, his extravagant lyricism, his unusual images. He could very aptly be compared to a miner who digs out enormous lumps of ore from the mines of Creation. It is not his business to mint it, but ours. He is a geologist, not a goldsmith, even if those titan hands that delve in mountains may be more skilled than many in dissecting a rose.

We have tried to extract the pure gold from his ore, but the reader must not be hurried and distracted or get discouraged too easily. Claudel is not to be taken piecemeal; he must be embraced as a whole. The reader who trusts in him will find that he has many wonders to relate. May the man who listens to him "leave heavy and unquiet," that is, burdened with a treasure which torments him and expands in his heart.

In each section of this Credo a dominant quality may be distinguished: for example, faith and wonder in speaking of God the Father; tenderness and compassion for the Son, the Redeemer;

a special fervor when reflecting on the Holy Spirit. Besides a sense of freshness in discussing the Blessed Virgin, and of complete dedication to the Church, there is fine psychological insight relating brotherly duty to the Communion of Saints, a subtle analysis of the struggle of the sinner with redeeming Grace (*Forgiveness of Sins*), and even a prophetic dimension in the twofold statement on the future life (*Resurrection of the Body* and *Life Everlasting*).

It will be evident from a close reading of these passages that Claudel has a predilection for certain themes, especially the poignant struggle between the soul and Grace, and its counterpart, the invasion of the soul by God. Here the poet's mystical insights are disclosed in all their profundity.

Whatever the particular theme, the reader will be struck by a certain characteristic attitude of Paul Claudel, which would change the face of the world were we all to embrace it: wonder. He marvels at God, he marvels at His work of creation and redemption, he marvels at Christ and the Blessed Virgin, he pronounces with his Lord that all things are good and even very good." [Gen. 1:31] He does not complain, he does not criticize, he receives all things graciously, joyously, and humbly, without any bitterness:

The general purpose of my life and vocation: a great longing and a great impulse toward divine joy, and the attempt to re-enlist the entire world in this movement . . . How I wish that Claudel the writer would disappear completely, and that from beneath the ridiculous trappings of the literary man would emerge the man who is incontestably there, that is, the servant of God; the man passionately devoted to the glory, the truth, and the love of God.

The feeling he is left with at the end of his life is one of "humility, of a pure and childlike regard, turned less and less towards himself and more and more towards the things of God." (*Accompagnements*, 225 and 228)

A passage in Claudel's commentary on Psalm 28, which illustrates very well his view on the further development of doctrine, provides a conclusion:

As with time there is an outward development of authority, so there is an inward development of doctrine. Nothing has changed, but everything comes into focus, and the third dimension is added to the first two. Where before we could see only a mass, there is now a system. The perspectives become clear, the terrain is disclosed, the relationships are delineated and defined. What was confused and jumbled becomes distinct. What was lifeless begins to move and offer itself to our study from all points of view. Scholastic subtlety does its work of restoration after heathen and heretical brutality has done its worst. All things become transparent, all things are illumined at once from without and within. There no longer remains a thicket where error may hide or the serpent escape the heel of the Woman.

*Sophie*, 171

In place of this thicket, there is a path of light cleared by all who have, like Claudel, meditated on the Scriptures and labored to publish them abroad.

May this book guide the reader to the sacred texts, and may he become submissive to the voice of the Spirit which breathed so sublimely within the poet's soul.

*Salut, grande nuit de la Foi, infaillible cité astronomique;  
C'est la nuit, et non pas le brouillard, qui est la patrie  
d'un catholique.*

*Corona*



# Contents

I Believe in God, the Father Almighty	3
And in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord	46
Born of the Virgin Mary	72
Suffered Under Pontius Pilate, Was Crucified, Died, and Was Buried	96
He Descended into Hell	126
The Third Day He Rose Again from the Dead	137
He Ascended into Heaven, and Sitteth at the Right Hand of God, the Father Almighty	144
From Thence He Shall Come to Judge the Living and the Dead	149
I Believe in the Holy Ghost	158
The Holy Catholic Church	175
The Communion of Saints	214
The Forgiveness of Sins	234
The Resurrection of the Body	264
And Life Everlasting	282



## *Key to Abbreviations of Claudel's Works Used in the Text*

TITLE	ABBREVIATION
Accompagnements	
Art poétique	
Les Aventures de Sophie	Sophie
Cinq Grandes Odes	Odes
Contacts et Circonstances	Contacts
Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher	Conversations
Corona Benigitatis Anni Dei	Corona
Correspondance André Suarès et Paul Claudel	Corr. Suarès
Correspondance Jacques Rivièvre et Paul Claudel	Corr. Rivièvre
Discours et Remerciements	Discours
Emmaüs	
L'Epée et le Miroir	Epée
L'Evangile d'Isaïe	Ev. Isaïe
Figures et Paraboles	Figures
Introduction au Livre de Ruth	Ruth
J'aime la Bible	J'aime
Paul Claudel interroge L'Apocalypse	Apocalypse
Paul Claudel interroge le Cantique des Cantiques	Cantique
Paul Claudel répond les Psaumes	Psaumes
Un Poète regarde la Croix	Poète
Positions et Propositions	Positions
Présence et Prophétie	Présence
La Rose et le Rosaire	Rose
Seigneur apprenez-nous à prier	Seigneur
Toi qui es-tu?	Toi
Trois figures saintes pour le temps actuel	Trois figures

The text of the Bible used in this book is that of the Confraternity Edition for all passages from the New Testament, and for the Old Testament so far completed. For the remainder of the Old Testament, the Douay version has been used.



I Believe in God



# I Believe in God, the Father Almighty

*O Credo, entier des choses visibles et invisibles,  
Je vous accepte avec un coeur catholique.*

*Odes, 57*

And then that event occurred which has dominated my life. In a single instant my heart was touched, and I believed. I believed with such an intensity of acceptance, with such an uplifting of my whole being, with such a power of conviction, with such certitude, leaving no room for any sort of doubt, that since then all the books, all the arguments, all the hazards of an active life have not succeeded in shaking my faith nor, to tell the truth, in touching it.

*Contacts, 12*

AND so it was that on Christmas Day, 1886, Paul Claudel, at the age of eighteen, having lost his faith, suddenly found himself face to face with an inescapable reality which was to revolutionize his life. This young man walked into a cathedral and emerged a moment later utterly transformed. He *believed*, and from that time until his dying breath, his entire life was to be animated by this belief.

This young man, who was hurled to the ground like another Paul on the road to Damascus, was also to learn to "suffer for my name" [Acts 9:16] and to become the spokesman of the living God. *Because I spoke, you believed.*

Who is this God who forced Himself so abruptly into his life? Claudel will tell us throughout his writings where he delights in enumerating the glories of his Lord and Master.

"I am who am" [Ex. 3:14] the Lord said to Moses in the burning bush—the one God, sovereign, transcendent, omniscient, eternal, boundless, possessing in an infinite degree Wisdom, Power, Justice, and Goodness.

This God is one in three Persons. This is the mystery of the Holy Trinity in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, all partaking of the same divine essence. *Neque confundentes personas, neque substantiam separantes,* de-

clares the Athanasian Creed. And further on: *Aequalis gloria, coae- terna majestas.* All the attributes of the Father belong to the Son and the Holy Spirit: eternity, power, boundlessness. . . .

The Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord, but there is only one Lord.

This sovereign Master is Creator and First Cause of everything that exists outside of Himself. He is also Ruler of this vast universe which He governs with infallible Providence. He is, moreover, the end of every man, who will, according to his works, find in Him fulfillment and beatitude.

Claudel has much to say of this God in his work, for He is above all a *living* God.

He is not a passive God, sitting on His throne; He is not an abstraction, a vague intellectualized notion. He is the God of Sinai and of the Beatitudes, a God "in full operation," even He who identified Himself to Moses: *I am.*

Pure Being, pure Action . . . "a God who breathes," Claudel has said.

A God who is very close to us and loves us, but who for this reason demands much of us. A God who is concerned with our affairs, sometimes more so than we would like Him to be: "Do you love me?" He says to the proud invalid at the most unforeseen moment. 'So much the worse if you find me abrupt, sudden, cruel, and

fierce.' And the poor wretch, disconcerted, cries: 'Lord, who is it you're after? You show me someone deep inside me who is more myself than I am!' (*Emmaüs*, 138)

This living God is God the Creator.

All things have proceeded from His hands, which are the hands of "a scholar, a doctor, a sculptor, a virtuoso." (*Cantique*, 206) His fingers at work on us, anointing and consecrating, are "more persuasive, more penetrating than myrrh." Claudel delights in exploring the inexhaustible splendors of Creation, and finding everywhere the imprint of their Author.

One must read *La Légende de Prâkriti* to see how well and with what relish Claudel's poetic energy, informed by science and animated by faith, has been able to reconstruct the colossal drama of geology. Prâkriti appears as the person to whom God gives His orders; she is at work in an enormous laboratory; from her cauldrons there emerges everything from continents, giant trees, and monsters, to infusoria and echinoderms.

Claudel never ceases to marvel at the spectacle of God's handiwork. He is frequently reminded of that passage in the Book of Genesis where it is said that God found His works not only good, but "very good," that is, perfectly adapted to their purpose.

This God is *just*.

The Justice of God is a distributive justice which provides every man with what he needs to achieve his end. His aim is harmony, not a narrow equalitarianism. If He asks for an accounting, it is in proportion to what He has given and to what He expects from each one of us, but He never abandons His mercy.

Far from grumbling about God's demands, Claudel extols this divine perfection whose purpose is to re-establish order and hierarchy among His creatures and who is able to examine them "down to the tenth part of a millimeter." (*Epée*, 187) And if God seems to show anger at the sight of our transgressions, well, Claudel says, "we love this anger, we want God to take us seriously," and he adds, "a jealous God, yes, as jealous as you please—that's the way we like Him." (*J'aime*, 45)

But how incomplete this picture would be without the addition of those other attributes which surpass all the rest: Mercy, Goodness.

The God of Claudel is a *good* God, a *Father*, and it is as such that He inspires the poet's most moving protestations of filial love. It is love that allows him to discover the most delicate designs of this Creator who did not create the world by force, with thunder and lightning, but "by means of entreaty." (*Rose*, 70) "He does

not order, He requests." (*J'aime*, 77)

He is not a monarch who forces nature to obey Him, but "a lover who questions with irresistible sweetness." And overcome with ecstasy, the poet sings his joy, he recites the Psalms of his predecessor, David, and translates them into his own idiom:

*Quel chant, ô mon Dieu, inventer à  
la mesure de mon émerveillement?  
Tu m'appelles, et je n'en finis pas  
d'user des heures à T'atteindre. . . .  
Crée-moi un visage, à la recherche  
du Tien.*

*Psaumes*

O my God, what song can I devise to the measure of my marveling? You call me, and I cannot consume the hours until I reach You. . . . Give me, Lord, a countenance, that I may find Your own.

And if God seems angry with his faults: "Do not turn away from me, O my God, it is so sad when You are not content." (*Psaumes*)

This is what it means to believe in God: it is to believe in His love and entrust oneself to it blindly. To accept the Credo is not, for Claudel, to adjust oneself to it

with an effort, but "to imbibe it for one's delight." (*Cantique*, 216)

The unknown, the unfathomable mystery of God, does not frighten him; it plunges him in wonder: "The way of God is eternal regeneration, eternal surprise." (*Positions II*, 171)

Claudel is a mystic and it is in the course of his meditations that he has experienced the sublime workings of Grace. "There are a great many things that He has chosen to confide to us only in a whisper," he tells us, having learned to come before God in utter silence. Finally, before the majesty of the All-Powerful, Claudel's faith becomes completely humble, adoring, and prostrate—a faith which is firmly grounded on the Credo of the Church, and wholly illumined by the most ardent love.

In a little pamphlet, *L'Abrégé de toute la doctrine chrétienne*, Claudel has made a condensation, not of apologetical ideas, but "a list of subjects to be examined, arranged in their logical and objective order." (*Toi*, 100)

It seems appropriate to place it at the beginning of this work.

## A Summary of Christian Doctrine

1. God is the perfect Being, in whom all power is action, inaccessible to our senses, of whom we can only state what He is and what He is not.

2. How do we know a living being whom we cannot see? By the movement of which he is the cause. The mole under the ground, the hare in the bush, the heart beneath the fingers. For we see that the whole universe is in movement. In this world all is movement, all bears witness to the divine restlessness of nature, always in a state of creation, incapable of existing by itself or in the presence of an unmoving Creator; everything betrays perpetual change.

3. Faith permits us to penetrate further into the mystery of divine physiology and to distinguish three aspects or functions, roles or persons: the Father who begets; the Son or Word or Reason who, by His existence perpetually defines the Father to Himself; the Holy Spirit, or Emanation or Love, which is the current running between the two, the Breath exhaled and inhaled.

4. God, being all-powerful, has created only good things. A thing is called good which is well suited to its function. A good pen, a good horse; more or less good because more or less suitable. God has only created things which are very good, that is, perfectly suited, according to their class, to bear Him clear testimony, to clarify Him. Imperfection in the work can, in fact, only be the result of some obstacle outside the will of the Creator.

5. We see, however, that at the present time things are in fact no longer very good, that is, perfectly suited to bear clear witness to their Creator. We no longer understand their language. And what are we to say if we turn to ourselves?

6. We live, then, in a state of disorder. There has been a corruption of the original Order, of the Order which charged all things to become visible; there has been a warping of certain wheels, which causes friction throughout the mechanism. The disorder cannot, by definition, be the work of the Creator, because everything that proceeds from Him is, by definition, good. Therefore it can only be the work of the free creature, free to choose himself as an end, instead of God who has no end.

Difference, preference . . . this false preference is the so-called *original sin*, which is the result of this original difference away from God in which the creature delights, and delights as an end in itself.

7. The consequence of original sin, by which the finite being chooses himself as end, is the *End*, either death or separation—separation for the rebel angels forever banned from life, death for man who loses his body, or the essential difference in which he delights.

8. By his sin, man withdraws from God his body and the service of his body, to which all nature is bound in solidarity. He is no longer “adjusted.” What he robbed while in a state of grace he cannot now restore in a state of sin. God alone can restore God (or God’s work) to Himself by a sort of re-creation or regeneration. *Fiat*, says the Father, *voluntas mea*. *Fiat voluntas tua*, answers the Son.

9. After the fall, man hides, confesses, recognizes, and buries his origin and crime in the womb of woman: after the generations are accomplished, God emerges from the womb of Mary Immaculate.

10. Through the fall, man accepted the end, or death, or finitude, or separation; through the cross, the Son of Man accepted the end, or death, or the destruction of finitude and separation.

11. The body of the faithful is restored to God in the visible unity of the Church, through our union with Christ, the head of the Church. Communion with Christ is essential. To relate to the Head, there must be a single body. We are the Body of the Church through our acceptance of its form, that is, the sacraments which are its arteries.

12. Christ is with us. He never ceases to be present to His Church, as teacher through the pope and the hierarchy, as doctor through the sacrament of Penance, as sustenance through the Eucharist.

13. Thus eternal joy is not far from us. It is not a dream or a morbid appetite; it is a fundamental, natural, and legiti-

mate organic need. "The Kingdom of God is within us." It lies in a free act of our will, in our acceptance of the invitation of Grace. Kingdom means submission to an accepted "order." It consists in the re-established order of the creature in his proper place, obedient to his Creator, participating in His life. *Fiat voluntas tua.*

14. This is why Catholic truth is best apprehended not theoretically, through the brain alone, but empirically, by placing our whole self in its proper order, like words in correct sequence, by orientation to our surroundings, and by service with the body.

*Correspondance André Saurès-Paul Claudel,* 204

## 1

### *The Value of the Credo*

When in my village church I hear the Credo being recited, one article after another, by the harsh voice of the soloist, to which the naïve whine of the little girls responds, I tremble with an inner ecstasy; it seems to me that I am present at the creation of the world. I know the cost of each one of those formulae printed in eternal truth—with what rending of heaven and earth, what rivers of blood, by what effort, what mental travail, and with what overflowing Grace they came to be born. I see those great masses of dogma emerge and take form before my eyes one after the other; I see man struggling painfully and finally succeeding in tearing out of his own heart the final affirmation. It is like a cathedral, immovable and yet advancing with all its columns from porch to choir.

*Epée,* 64

## 2

This lifegiving Credo which we repeat faithfully every day, what is it but a distillation of mysteries? Each of its suc-

cessive articles is the revelation of a fact which our intelligence is incapable of controlling, and which we have no choice but to accept and absorb—to our delight. For each of these drops, these distilled nights, is quickened and impregnated with light, love, power, and joy. Now we fully understand the meaning of the eleventh verse of Psalm 138: "Night shall be my light."<sup>1</sup>

*Cantique, 216*

### 3

#### *The One Religion*

What do they mean with all their religions? Are there really as many as all that? For me there is only one, and that is the Christian, Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion. All the others are but the work of man.

*Emmaüs, 24*

### 4

#### *Sweetness of the Divine Law*

(Commentary on Canticle of Canticles, 1:16: "The beams of our house are cedars, our rafters, cypresses.")

The walls around us are of cypress, we are told. Cypress, like cedar, is a fragrant and incorruptible wood, but it has also a funereal connotation. Walls of cypress around us serve as a reminder of our ultimate end, of those boundaries before, behind, to right and to left which cannot be transgressed. We live within certain laws beyond which lie only death and sin. But how sweet are those laws! How agreeable it is within these panels which have been joined and finished by the carpenter's son!

*Rose, 56*

<sup>1</sup> See also Canticle of Canticles, 5:2: "For my head is wet with dew, my locks with the moisture of the night."

## 5

*The Holy Scriptures, Foundation of Our Faith*

Through the Holy Scriptures, God has revealed to us without the least ambiguity all that is necessary for our salvation, and first is the content of our belief: one God, Creator of all things, original sin, eternal life, retribution, redemption, incarnation, the sacraments, the Church, etc. The Church, in its sovereign authority, has summed all this up over the course of the centuries in a body of dogmatic definitions which we are no more permitted to doubt than we are the sources from which she has drawn them. "Let your speech be, 'Yes, yes'; 'No, no.'" [Matt. 5:37] This is why the Credo, enumerating all the articles of our spiritual agreement, does not fail to add: *according to the Scripture.*

*Ruth, 24*

## 6

*The Believer*

The Christian is a man who knows what he is doing and where he is going in a world of men who, worse than brutish beasts, no longer know the difference between good and evil, between yes and no. He is like a god standing out in a crowd of invalids and alcoholics, not by his own right, but because he has placed himself in harmony with all nature by subordinating himself to the proper authority. He alone has liberty in a world of slaves.

*Corr. Rivière, 69*

## 7

*Controversy Reinforces Faith*

It is often by means of the opposition which it arouses, the variety of resources it must summon in order to stand its

ground and hold fast to its principles, and the strength of the resistance which it encounters and, one might almost say, provokes, that a passive faith becomes active, takes on form, movement, and expression; that after being dormant it becomes aware, and instead of remaining ingeniously defensive, becomes vigorously and courageously militant.

Having accepted this criterion, we can say that there is no doctrine more creative, more revealing, more searching, and more quickening for man than our Christian and Catholic faith. Its value lies not only in that deep and intimate harmony with our original nature which it sustains in us, but in its open and determined opposition to what I will call the counterfeit and the idolatrous, to everything in us that is the work of second nature, of weakness, error, bad judgment, and bad practice.

To bring about the conversion of all our faculties, to spread the Gospel to all the provinces of our souls, to put fire and sword to all our savage instincts, to drag the plowshare through this hard and ungrateful soil, to take arms against the monsters of concupiscence and imagination—this is not the work of a day and, even with the help of Grace, it is not always the triumph of a lifetime. It is impossible to be a Christian without effort. It is impossible to bring forth the new man without a painful and often heroic co-operation with the God who made us and who asks our help to make us anew.

This unremitting warfare which the Christian's vocation obliges him to wage with the inferior side of his own nature, with the carapace of his own ignorance, and with the ferment of rebellion always seething within him, prepares and arms him for the external arena and for the struggle with this world which, until it has been overcome and subdued by the cross, as we have been promised, will not spare us its assaults. Man needs a banner. He needs a cause. He needs a leader. I will even say that he needs an enemy whose incessant activity forces him to the examination of his own actions, the assessment of his own resources, and the mobilization and

deployment of his own energies. It is not only ourselves we must defend, it is the idea of a personal God, a superior reality without which man reverts to the beast and civilization to chaos.

The spirit which must move us is that which inspired the Machabees when, alone in all the universe, they stood against the Hellenic civilization at its zenith and heroically defended the idea of a transcendent God. It is not merely our own lives which are at stake—it is the spiritual salvation of mankind for which we are each responsible in our own way, and in whose interest we can never muster sufficient information, moral force, or supplies for the battle and the sacrifice. It is a matter which concerns ourselves, our God, and our fellow men. Only by becoming men who are fully aware, only by donning the shining armor of our calling, will we realize the vocation which has been given to us and be true to our glorious device: *Agere et pati fortia christianum est.*

*Contacts*, 50

## 8

He who no longer believes in God no longer believes in anything.

*Corr. Rivière*, 59

## 9

### *God's Transcendence*

God is unity. All that is not God is plurality. God is pure act. All that is not God is the product of power and action. God is immovable. All that is not God is movement by the transition from power to action. God is eternal. All that is not God is intermittent and successive and subject to the terms of what, on earth, we call Time.

*Présence*, 263

## 10

*Unity*

The divine unity exerts on all things a unifying and anagogical influence.

*Présence*, 315

## 11

*Trinity*

The Father begets the Son, the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Love between the two is the breath of communication.

*Emmaüs*, 143

## 12

*A Living God*

The Trinity is not something lifeless or passive; it is something which lives, breathes, and acts.

*Ev. Isaïe*, 64

## 13

Even in God there is a respiration; we worship a living God who acts, who breathes, who exhales His very Self.

*J'aime*, 73

## 14

Philosophy has too long accustomed us to the idea of an abstract God: impassive and indifferent. The Bible gives us a very different picture of Him. It shows us a living Being—loving, angry, merciful, passionate—someone in whom we

are delighted to find our own resemblance, and who is not so much the negation of all that is in us, His children, as its transcendent perfection. The saints know whereof they speak when they talk about the Heart of God and His fatherly bowels. And the Old Testament resounds from first to last with His roar of rage over the betrayal of His firstborn, the shocking rebellion of His beloved son, which obliged Him to create the world and to suffer everything to which Bethlehem and Golgotha bear witness.

*Emmaüs*, 183

## 15

God is in no sense jealous of His creation. All that He creates, He creates in imitation of His own excellence. Intolerant of inertia, He calls forth movement and then proceeds to introduce the principle of movement, which is life. For He Himself is the Living One *par excellence*. To Moses' question He replies that His name is *I am*. But when the volcanic moment is finally at hand, the moment for God to place Himself in the mouths of the prophets, then another name is revealed to us: *I live! I live! Ego vivo!*

*J'aime*, 72

## 16

God's way is eternal regeneration, eternal surprise.

*Positions II*, 171

## 17

### ***God, the First Cause***

God is; that is one idea. Where God is, is an altogether different idea. God has neither body nor matter. He cannot, therefore, be anywhere, be bounded, as in a prison, by any-

thing that is material. If He were some place, it would follow that there was another place where He was not. He is, therefore, omnipresent.

When we want to look at a picture, we make use of our eyes. When we listen to music, we make use of our ears. When we think about God and meditate on Him, we need neither our eyes nor our ears, but we have the idea of *cause* to guide us. As a creating and sustaining cause, God is everywhere present. Everything is, as a result of Him, but He Himself remains always cause and never result.

*Toi*, 78

## 18

### **God's Name (Revealed to Moses in the Burning Bush)**

God imparts the Name which He confided neither to the three patriarchs,<sup>2</sup> nor to Noah, nor, doubtless, to Adam; the Name on which, according to St. Paul, the angels fear to gaze. Now for the first time it is about to take on a human resonance.

*"I am who am!* This is what you shall tell the Israelites: *I am* sent me to you." [Ex. 3:14]

This is the inauguration of that dread Name by which God is to swear throughout Scripture. . . . Here surrendering His Name, God surrenders Himself.

*Emmaüs*, 81

## 19

We have here Someone who has taken the initiative, Someone who comes and introduces Himself to us by saying I. I am. And who are you, then? asks Moses. I am I. I am who am . . . it is I, behold Me. For your sake I have taken on a temporal self as well as a presence, a self capable of listening, understanding, and replying. I hereby confide to you the

<sup>2</sup> Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Name to which I will answer whenever called, whenever formed by your heart and your mouth, whenever acknowledged by that aspect of yourselves which partakes of Being.

Every day we hear some stranger introduce himself: I am the butcher, I am the electrician, I am the notary; and the Lord, too, might well have told us: I am the Creator of heaven and earth. But instead He tells us: I am who am. I am He whose very essence is Being. I am He whose whole profession is to attend to this single duty, this single activity in Himself of existing, of existing with His own existence. I am One who never ceases to conceive Himself and to profess Himself as One who exists. I am One whose name is the Being of His Being. A man, an animal, an idea is *something* other than itself. But I am . . . I am my own Being.

*Emmaüs*, 82

## 20

### *God as Judge*

Rebellious soul, the deed drawn up between your Creator and you, sealed within your body, watermarked on your soul, is still binding! You did not choose to avail yourself of the means you had of discharging your debt to God (for it was none other than God Himself who placed Himself in your hands). Now Justice is at hand. Whose impress is burned on that piece of you which has the power to release you from your debts? It is God's. Render then to God the things that are God's. *Solve usque ad ultimum quadrantem*. What you did not choose to fulfill positively you can still answer negatively. You can still pronounce the Yes by means of the No. "If I sink to the nether world, you are present there." [Ps. 138:8]

You can still satisfy the contract by your denial, you can complete your interpretation of the law by your eternal payment of the appropriate fine. One does not escape God.

*Emmaüs*, 153

**21***Exactness of Justice*

Man's machines are exact to the ten-thousandth of a millimeter, as may be verified through a microscope. God's justice is no less exact or exacting. Even in this world many people know what it costs them to undo the results of a major error: endlessly returning the job to the fire to permit further refining.

*Epée*, 187

**22**

The word of God, St. Paul tells us, is keener than any two-edged sword [Heb. 4:12] whether it goes forward to cut down the obstacle or backward to triumph over the resistance.

*Epée*, 11

**23***The Wrath of God*

What joy, what ecstasy it is to see our Father living and overflowing with love for us, with tenderness, compassion—all the right emotions, even anger! Yes, we love this anger, we want Him to take us as seriously in our transgressions as in our attempts to do good. Those fools who talk about a cruel God are imbeciles. He is a jealous God, yes, as jealous as you please, but we love Him that way.

*J'aime*, 43

**24***The Hand of God*

These are the infinite and ubiquitous fingers with which God touches, retouches, and controls His creation in

the manner of an organist, a lover, a builder. Is it not written in the prophet Isaia that “My hand laid the foundations of the earth; my right hand spread out the heavens?” [Isa. 48:13] It is this hand, guided by the Holy Spirit, which He offers in confirmation of His promise to the whole Creation. It is the consecrated hand of the Sanctifier and the Priest, for it is written in the Canticle of Canticles that His fingers drip choice myrrh. [Cant. 5:5] There is the hand that grips the sword and the one that swings the censer, the hand that commands and the hand that pardons, the hand that anoints Emperors and the hand that leads little Tobias to catechism.

*Présence*, 274

## 25

### *God's Benevolence*

God's great charity toward His creation is not that daily Providence whereby He dispenses nourishment, as the Psalm puts it, “in due season,” or His special gifts to such as have found favor in His eyes. It is when He permits us to do something for Him. The first cry of St. Paul when he fell head over heels from his horse on the road to Damascus—would you believe he does not even think to say thank you?—is: “Lord, what wilt thou have me do?” [Acts 9:6] The first cry of creation, from the lowest of the low to the highest of the high, is: Lord, how can I serve You with these gifts You have granted me?

*J'aime*, 74

## 26

The world is not large enough to contain the burden of mercy of which we must free You.

*Psaume*, 118

It makes suffering worth while to know how You are able to console.

*Psaume, 118*

## 27

As for me, I believe in a good God and in a life which is on the side of good, a life in which it is not a matter of indifference whether one takes one path or another.

*Corr. Rivière, 172*

## 28

Scripture admits of a mass of allusions and faint echoes which are a delight to those whose hearts have been touched and whose ears have been purified by love. Let us understand that there are many things that God has chosen to impart to us only in a whisper.

*J'aime, 22*

## 29

We can hardly bear to leave that fatherly shoulder to which the prodigal son returned in tears.

*Ruth, 70*

## 30

You have a Father in heaven who can no longer tell you from His Son!

*Seigneur, 72*

## 31

Take courage, then, presumptuous soul, in the thought that you have to do with a God whose mercy prevents Him

from seeing clearly. The Bible teems with blind patriarchs, and doubtless it was the news of his father's dimmed vision which hastened the return of the prodigal son. For we know too well that when we rush into His arms, His eyes will be good for nothing but weeping. . . . It is not by sight that the Father knows His son, but by touch. "The Lord beholdeth the heart." [I Kings, 16:7] It is of the heart alone that He demands the secret of our love. He inhales us that He may know our scent.

*Présence*, 41

## 32

O my God, how good it is to be with You! Like finding a shelter against the north wind and the bad season, or a huge rock which gives shade in a scorching land. Our eyes help us to see clearly, and it is wonderful how well our ears can listen—almost well enough to hear. I am this poor dazed wretch who knows nothing, and the words with which to question You rise haltingly, one by one, to my lips. All that my heart held of artifice, or guile, or pretense, or presumption; all that false nourishment which prevented true hunger and thirst, that windmill of vain words in my head that tried to deafen me—how good it is to have done with it all and simply to be here, tasting the utter annihilation of Your justice. There is someone in me other than myself who has taken command and rules over all my faculties.

*Ev. Isaïe*, 106

## 33

The art and action of the devil, the mystics tell us, are always violent, sulphurous, and strained: the flame and the hammer, the fiery forge. The art and action of God, on the other hand, according to the description given us in the Book of Wisdom, works through Grace by means of a deep pene-

tration, a sweet solicitation of our virtues. Could it be more aptly compared than to a dew, a liquid expansion responding to the light's persuasion, a decorum in fervor, an inclination for release, purification, and life? Buy it, then—you do not need money, thirst is enough—buy this precious elixir which is at once both milk and wine. . . .

Listen, my child, you must see that all these gifts which I freely offer do not return empty to that infinite sea which I have opened for you. It is up to you to fashion a water wheel for it. Go to it, two-legged engineer: create, invent, cultivate, sow, broadcast, build, do good, multiply!

*Ev. Isaie, 266*

## 34

### *The Hands of Love*

"For he wounds, but he binds up; he smites, but his hands give healing." [Job 5:18]

We meet again those wise and gentle hands which not so long ago were thrust into us through the gaping cleft in our being. . . .

The left hand sustains, presents, and adjusts, and the right hand creates. Let us admire the harmonious and unspeakably sensitive performance of these twin artisans. They reach out, and the heart of St. Thérèse melts at their touch. When the tumor and the wound are revealed to the unfailing forefinger by a stab of pain, they heal, unless we compel the physician to interfere. Quick as a glance, the hands examine us from head to foot, not by means of our outward form, but by the inward configuration of our motives. The most accomplished virtuoso is not more intimately acquainted with the notes of his keyboard or the strings of his instrument than are these hands with the convolutions of our minds, the dilations of our hearts, and all the intersecting network of our nerves. How can we resist the hands which molded us and which know more than one way to resume

their potter's work? *Non conclusisti me in manibus inimici.*<sup>3</sup> [Ps. 30:9] The clay is not made which is capable of resisting these two hands which attack simultaneously from within and from without. We see them pressing the sun like a giant sponge from which they squeeze the light. There are horns in the centers of His hands.

Ah, these are not only the hands of the Creator, they are the hands of the crucified.

*Cantique*, 231

### 35

#### *The Ingenuity of Divine Grace*

We open our lips to God, we make ourselves all mouth to receive that white pebble mentioned in the Apocalypse—but no, it is not a pebble we are given to swallow, it is a hand. It is that dactylic star whose image we bear at the end of our arms. A physician's hand, a lover's hand, a sculptor's hand, the hand of a virtuoso; it is a searching, testing, intelligent hand, so supple it needs only its five fingers to sort out the scrambled threads of our lives. It is also a technician's hand which fixes the pattern which we weave on our loom.

*Cantique*, 206

### 36

It is not without reason that when God approaches us, He chooses the disguise not only of a king, a husband, a father, but of a beggar, a leper, an outcast. But we—we have no need of disguise. Our naïve reality, our childlike helplessness in the void, our deep-seated absurdity, the ridiculousness that is our prerogative, our abysmal weakness—they are our masks and our court dress. For these the angels laugh and weep;

<sup>3</sup> In Hebrew, strength and power are called horns. Claudel preserves this sense in his allusion to the horns of the cross, or the wounds in Christ's hands, where his power was concealed.—*Trans.*

here is the pitiful and sacred tie between our Father and us, here is the irresistible folly, here is the oath sworn by the Eternal on behalf of His bruised and bloodstained creature.

*Présence*, 103

## 37

### *Providence*

The true God is equally concerned with the luminosity of a nebula and the structure of an earthworm. With what incredible attention to detail, what sympathy, what benevolence, what wisdom, what compassion, what humor! He carries on an uninterrupted conversation with all His creatures. How, then, could He not be concerned for us? . . .

In man, the relation of cause to effect takes on the conscious quality of filiation, of the relation of a father to a son. . . . "His eyes behold, his searching glance is on mankind." [Ps. 10:4] Where is the Father? He resides at the roots of all things, He is in no one place because He Himself is the Father of all location, of all geometric and mathematical coordinates of space. Theology tells us that He is pure Action, the living substance residing in itself. Our heart tells us simply that He made us, that He is involved in our existence and our lives as the author of the idea by virtue of which we came to be. And if you ask your heart where is its God, this simple and ignorant creature replies, like Magdalen, "He is there." This is all it needs to know. It is not God who exists in relation to the heart, it is the heart which exists in relation to Him. Wherever God is, the heart is with Him. It is in Him. "Where I am," Our Lord says in the Gospel according to St. John, "there also shall my servant be." [John 12:26]

Thus we should not try to imagine God outside of ourselves. We should try to meet Him within our hearts by immersing ourselves in His divine Presence.

*Toi*, 78

## 38

*God Awaits Our Love*

“Dost thou love me?” [John 21:15–17]

At any cost, we must give an answer.

The proud man who has been knocked to the ground (suddenly someone is at his throat, a knee is on his chest), the invalid, at the mercy of his private monster for days and months and years, the husband surrounded by the children his wife has just abandoned, the merchant facing the threat of bankruptcy, the mother beside the child who has just died— “Dost thou love Me? So much the worse if you find Me abrupt and sudden, cruel and fierce! At least, I have succeeded in knocking you off your perch. I am down here. The Hindus told you to ascend, well, *I tell you to come down!*”

“Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for I must stay in thy house today.” [Luke 19:5]

In *thy* house—it is this familiarity that undoes me. Lord, who is it You are after? Surely not this nonentity, this cipher whose name can be found in the telephone book! You show me someone deep inside me, beyond me, older than I, but more myself than I am.

*Emmaüs*, 138

## 39

God alone can teach us to love God. All we can do is prepare the inflammable substance as best we can and, as the physicists say nowadays, wait for the chain reaction. All we can do, within the limitations of our miserable egotism, is listen for and help along that feeble cry which struggles to say, Father! *Abba!*

The conversion of the mind is difficult enough, but how much more so the conversion of the heart! For the love of God is total, embracing all things, and jealous; it is at once

personal and transcendent. It beckons us to that path which leads to His heart of hearts, for God is love. He is not too weary after all the miracles, nor all the miseries in which we founder, nor all the extremities through which our fortunes lead us, to reveal Himself to us as our one hope of salvation.

*Emmaüs, 137*

## 40

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength!" [Luke 10:27] Good Lord, what a commandment, what a syllabus! We are only too glad to pass on these formidable words to our children, and if You ordered us, as You did the Israelites, to inscribe them on our doors, to wear them on little bands around our arms and foreheads, this would be far easier than to engrave them on our souls. You do not ask much—just our *whole* heart, our *whole* soul, our *whole* strength. Even in our own interests and to satisfy our most urgent and immediate needs, we manage to use only a weak, inadequate, and incoherent portion of those potentialities which are attributed to us. As for Mr. Average Man, even when backed to the wall and hard pressed on all sides by circumstance, he can scarcely manage to summon, for better or worse, a feeble last recourse. And we are to do all this for *Your* sake, for the sake of the Absentee *par excellence*, the—how shall I say?—professional Absentee, the One who by definition eludes all our direct inquiries. My reader may say, "I do not know about those Israelites, but as for *me*, the person under discussion, I manage to get along pretty well without all this."

Tell me, do you also get along without breathing? There is a heart in your breast that knows more about God's command, and has known it longer, than you do. For this heart incessantly and tirelessly makes, unmakes, and remakes

you, drenches you in Him, and forces you back to the very extremity of your being.<sup>4</sup> And what sustains this heart, what keeps it beating, if not our power of dilation, if not our power of inhalation and exhalation? Which is another way of saying that we live by God, we take fire from God, through God alone we nourish that flame which we must keep alive for our allotted time. I am well aware that we do not meet God face to face, but what more ingenious chemistry could He devise than to blend Himself with our breathing?

*Emmaüs*, 128

## 41

It is only after the deliverance from Egypt, after the manna, the parting of the waters, after Sinai, after those forty years when an entire nation took their nourishment from His very hands, that God, through the mouth of His representative, Moses, on the eve of His death, removes the veil from a dread choice, as if it could no longer be withheld, and decides to betray His inmost thoughts and desires. And similarly, it is only after three years of preaching, teaching, and petitioning, of the revelation of all the mysteries, corroborated by all the miracles, after the Last Supper, the Cross, and the Resurrection, that Our Lord ventures to ask His chief disciple, almost with a certain timidity, the question which has been postponed until then, "Peter, dost thou love me?" But once is not enough; the question is repeated, "Peter, dost thou love me?" And yet a third time—for on this answer everything depends; the leader of our Church must hear the solemn and heartbreaking question, "Peter, dost thou love me?" [John 21:15–17]

*Emmaüs*, 137

<sup>4</sup> Literally, "of your star" (*étoile*) which represents the body with its five "prongs"—the head and the four limbs.—*Trans.*

## 42

And so with us Christians, it is not just once but all through our lives of joy and sorrow that God repeatedly asks us—less with a voice than with that ear tirelessly bent towards us, “Do you love Me? Do you love Me?” and yet again, “Is it really true? Is it really from the bottom of your heart and your soul and your mind? Do you love Me?”

*Emmaüs*, 138

## 43

*Solicitude*

God, our lover, tirelessly lays siege to that well-guarded citadel where we are the prisoners of sin, ignorance, and habit. He is there like the light, ready to take advantage of the tiniest crack. And what an enormous breach is being widened every hour of the day and night by those thousands of priests and believers who, surrendering to their duty, are beginning to speak to God in His own language!

“Behold the handmaid of the Lord,” Mary is continually telling God in heaven, and the Church is continually telling God on earth.

*Accompagnements*, 148

## 44

There is an intelligence at work on us which the learned theologian calls *subtle*, which I like to read as *ingenious*. Under this penetrating gaze, at once grave and persistent, we feel our soul becoming clear even in its own eyes. Being pure, “she penetrates and pervades all things by reason of her purity.” [Wis. 7:24] Such an intelligence can cut through whatever is acquired, irrelevant, artificial—the allu-

vium of sin and habit. It goes straight to the essential, it reunites in us the principle of causality and reverence, and that attempt on our part to stand erect which results in the cry *Abba*. It releases our stiffened limbs, and teaches us not to use the left hand to make the sign of the cross. *It penetrates all things.*

This does not mean that it has any traffic with sin, but it has that simplicity and sincerity which is able to distinguish light from shadows and, by separating the shadows, renders them distinct and ready to disappear at the confessional grill. It impregnates us to the roots, it takes a sort of plaster cast of us. This vigorous and pithy benevolence, which is not put off by any dodge or denial, pushes quietly and relentlessly into our inmost vitals. It blends baptism, union, spirit with our breathing. In its presence, the ordinary man suddenly feels that he is accepted, that he can be understood. Just let it try to withdraw now, and the sense of loss would wring from man a cry of anguish and despair.

The Church knows what it is saying when it speaks of an inner light, a lifegiving light! . . . Just as one says that a patient has a fever, here we in our turn "have" light and truth.

Rose, 227

## 45

### *His Love for His Creature*

"On that day says the Lord, She shall call me, 'My husband,' and never again 'My baal.'" [Osee 2:18]

This declaration of marriage which God audibly and distinctly makes to man—do we realize even today the extent to which it is inordinate, unprecedented, staggering, and how far it exceeds the most extravagant dreams of paganism? This Creator God on whom the most powerful spirits fear to gaze becomes, against all the laws of nature, our Lover in the most

possessive sense of the word, adhering to the deepest root of our being. He becomes not only our lover but our son, for He has also assumed our face and our flesh! Overcome with wonder, I can only say it is madness, it is too much. . . .

Look, see God striding across the earth like a sower; He takes His heart in both hands, and scatters it over the face of the earth!

*Ev. Isaïe, 200, 202*

## 46

“Could you not then watch one hour with me?” Could you not grant me the favor of an hour? The Eternal is at your feet, Israel, do you not hear Him begging for the favor of an hour? Has He done nothing for you, ungrateful people? Have you found Him faithless or untrue? What cause has He given you that you now refuse Him your trust? For all eternity I have loved you, He says, I have cared for you, I have been yours. One would say that I am God just for your sake. And you, can you not give Me an hour? One hour is all the time I need to give you everything. One hour is all I need to restore to my beloved Son all that I created for his sake. If you only knew what need you have of Me and I, in turn, of you!

*Ev. Isaïe, 17*

## 47

### *The Service of God*

God has become our guest, He is seated at our table. Each day we give Him food and drink, we offer Him the fruits of our labors. There is a whole race whose sole duty is to serve Him. And surely not without an element of fear, that fear which is the beginning of wisdom. Nor without an element of interest; why not? God knows the human heart. He wants us to love Him with our whole heart and our whole strength; why should He not want us to invest in Him a vital

interest, a daily interest, a basic interest composed of all other types of interest, including the most humble?

*Emmaüs*, 127

## 48

### *Intimacy with God*

By means of intimacy, by means of forcing His company on us, by means of that fine net of obligations and gestures which He spreads over all the activities of our lives, God hopes that eventually we will feel at home, that we will gain confidence, and through confidence, Faith, and through Faith, good faith. God hopes that we will no longer respond rationally but instinctively to His wishes, and that we will learn to show to Him, Who is Grace itself, something other than an ill grace. God hopes that one day there will move deep in our hearts, like an underground stream, the meaning of this cry: *fili, praebe mihi cor tuum!* and that sometime, when we are sure no one can hear us, we will no longer call Him *You*, or *Thou* with a capital T, but *thou* with a small t.

*Emmaüs*, 127

## 49

### *God, Motive of Our Actions*

God, on whom no good intention is lost, nor any lovely object, nor any kind deed, and who knows the true value of the orchid and the diamond which no human eye will ever see, also knows anything that we do for His sake, which should be our sole motive.

*Corr. Suarès*, 100

## 50

### *To Live in God*

I rise in the morning, I open my window to the sun, and I inhale God. I stretch out my arms as far as they will go,

and I inhale God's creation! All this passes from the outside in—the whole Creation, all things visible and invisible, in one draught, and with it that part of me which is perpetually creating it anew. It is worth your while to linger for a moment with eyes and ears closed so that, when you reopen them, you may partake more fully and deeply of the Cause. "Open wide your mouth," says the Psalm, "and I will fill it." [Ps. 80:11]

*Emmaüs*, 129

## 51

### *Collaboration*

The Incarnation and the Redemption, those prodigious events, have benefited man, but the ultimate end for the Son was the Father, the reparation of the harm done His Father, the restoration of His damaged workmanship, damaged not only by the original sin of man but by the primordial revolt of Satan. It is staggering to realize that for this work He needed us, and continues to need us. Hence the incomparable dignity of the Blessed Virgin over all other saints. And we, too, according to our station in life, according to our vocation in the Church, are called to God's assistance. Even this has been granted us!

*J'aime*, 19

## 52

### *Remember to Keep Holy the Sabbath Day*

The commandment begins *remember*. Indeed, in the course of the working days, in the occupations and preoccupations of the week, we are inclined to forget God, to stop thinking about Him. It is therefore necessary to set aside one day for the express purpose of thinking of Him, a day to be consecrated to Him, to be lived in His presence and in His awareness. We must insert a pause, suspend the course of our

activities and our labors in order to place ourselves in an attitude of meditation and retreat, and to give our Master time to see and judge what we have done. This abstention, this recess, is therefore the first condition of *sanctification*.

*Sophie*, 127

## 53

### *Man and the Angels*

What do you think of this idea: man exists in order to know, and the Angel knows in order to exist? Man was made to give God the acknowledgment, the free and intelligent homage of the various ranks of the material Creation which are ranged above and beside and around him, down to the lowest form of life. The Angel draws his reason for being directly from God Whom he translates at sight, thereby realizing his own existence in that peculiar manner which distinguishes him from the other spirits around him who are necessary to his apparition.

*Présence*, 253

## 54

### *God's Relations with Man in the Bible*

The terrible Yahweh of Sinai, who manifested Himself in thunder and earthquakes, a woman has ravished with one glance of her eyes, with one bead of her necklace.<sup>5</sup> He has become the darling, the plaything. She brings Him into her mother's house, where she will prepare for Him that cup which He will have ample time to savor at Gethsemane and on Calvary. And He in turn will teach her something which conquers death, which is above death, and in comparison with which the gift of one's person, or indeed one's very substance, is worth nothing at all.

From this point on, sacred history is nothing but a love

<sup>5</sup> The woman represents Humanity; cf. Canticle of Canticles, 4:9.

story, an appeal to the tenderest, most natural and profound sentiments of the human heart, with whose pathos the most popular novels of all the world's literatures can never compare. This Humanity who is a woman and who was so moving in the part of Rebecca and of Ruth, and so strong in the role of Delilah and of Bathsheba, we now see rescued from devils by a youth sent into the heart of Asia for this purpose; we see the King of the Universe sharing his scepter with her, before the courage of a besieged city puts a victorious sword in his hands.<sup>6</sup> What indulgence on the part of the Husband and, alas, what frivolity on the part of the Wife, and what untiring treachery in return for constant forgiveness!

*J'aime*, 28

## 55

### *Covenant with the Chosen People*

You are my Seminary. You are the human plot which I have set aside for myself in order to obtain, out of all countries and ages, the perfect blossom for which I have waited. I chose you, I transplanted you, I carried you in my arms. For forty years I, Myself, fed and watered you. It is My will that you be fed and watered only by Me; it is My will to possess you and to give Myself to you to possess in utter dependence, to instil in you forever the taste for Me, for the Father and the Mother that I am. . . . I wish there to be no human activity, whether it be to eat or to work, to fight or to propagate, or to exercise whatever form of possession has escaped My glance.

The problem now is to give the desired form to this instrument of My will which is what you must be. This is not the work of a day. For it is not enough for Me to fashion you a body, I must fashion you a heart to match. Learn from Me,

\* One will have recognized successively: Sarah and Tobias, Esther and Assuerus, and Judith.

by having to do without Me, by all the methods which I will use to train you, by not being able to get along without Me and My love. Learn from Me what it has cost to teach you to be My son. I am not only One who imposes, but One who proposes. . . .

Thus speaks the Eternal to His people, as the basket maker speaks to the basket taking shape in his hands.

*Emmaüs*, 119

## 56

### *God the Creator*

God has sown the world with His likeness.

*J'aime*, 26

## 57

From the first lines of Genesis, how happy we are to see divine Love operating not so much by way of injunction as by way of solicitation. The *Fiat lux* does not present light as a fabrication but as a spontaneous eruption in answer to a wish. And how could the sea and the desert ever bring themselves to begrudge the fish, the birds, and all the other animals to that Lover who questions them with such irresistible sweetness?

*Rose*, 70

## 58

During the last two centuries, Christians have had only two attitudes toward the world. The first has been to regard it as bad, as sordid and contemptible, a source of temptation or, at best, of distraction. This attitude amazes me and strikes me as close to heretical. For after all, the world is God's work, it speaks to us of its Author in a language which we should learn

with infinite reverence, joy, and care; it is made up of things which God Himself has solemnly declared to be good and very good. The second attitude is one of filial placidity. These people believe in God and calmly accept His benefits, simply taking them at face value as useful for the welfare of their bodies, without trying to discover whether by any chance God's benefits might be useful for the welfare of their souls. This is somewhat the attitude of a stockholder.

The truly Christian view is that all God's works are not only good, but very good, not only in relation to us, whom they delight, but in relation to God, Whom they signify; and although their material usefulness may result from the labor of our body, their spiritual meaning is the result of the searching of our mind.

*Toi, 49*

## 59

### *The Virtuosity of the Creator*

You created all things at once, and behold all things grow at Your summons like the seedlings in a flower bed of whom the gardener says, "They're coming along nicely . . ." You clap your hands and suddenly there appears the angel, the chimpanzee, the butterfly, the whale, and the toad wearing spectacles—not to mention those galaxies which burst and spill forth like egg yolk, who knows how or why!

*Ev. Isaïe, 172*

## 60

I have only to breathe, and behold, a plant, an animal. And wonder of wonders! . . . one fine day there emerged from me a living man—someone capable of understanding when spoken to, and of asking questions and giving answers.

*Ev. Isaïe, 136*

## 61

God has a design which He carries out in successive stages, not by virtue of an arbitrary decision but in order that each day may make its contribution to the one that follows, and each evening contain the innovations of the new day. First He creates light, as if in order to see clearly, and next, that vast expanse [of firmament] which is at once a principle of adhesion in form and a principle of variation in hierarchy. . . . Without light and space, there could be no plant life. God "orders" a plant as one orders some item from a workshop already in operation. One could just as well say that he *requests* it and lo, the whole mechanism, dimly conscious of its own hidden potentialities, responds *multifariam multisque modis* to what is required of it.

And so it goes as the Creator orders the reptiles, the fish, the birds, from the earth, the sea, and the sky—and finally man.

*J'aime*, 77

## 62

It is easy to imagine that God created the world not so much by a succession of *tours de force* as by a series of requests. This is how nature must have received the order for the palm tree, the mushroom, the fern, the insect, the four-footed animal (and why not the two-footed animal as well?), to which it must have replied with a wondrous variety of submissions. God acts in His own unique way, and when we consider those mysterious propositions which He addresses to nature, how can we imagine that He abstains from them in the case of his favorite creature?

*Discours*, 118

## 63

For all created things, inequality and particularity is a condition of life. "According to their kind, according to their nature," the Bible insists. It is a whole catalogue that is disclosed at once. The creatures not only multiply, they compete. Their whole reason for existence lies in diversity. They act as each other's boundaries, that is to say, limitations. Each is defined outwardly by its form and inwardly by its needs. One finishes what another started. One supplies the answer to the question unconsciously posed by the other. . . .

*Figures, 118*

## 64

*Nature at Work (Personified by Prâkrti)*

We find Prâkrti busily engaged in making her concoctions. The giant ovens are operating on all sides, the scales rise and fall, the continents are subjected to an alternating system of baths and emersions, enormous vegetable masses are put on the fire, thickened, kneaded, sprinkled with salt and sand, and treated with powerful sauces. A mineral darkness is created, in which fire finds its fuel and modern man the materials for his kitchen. . . .

(We have arrived at the age of the giant reptiles.)

These are veritable animal tanks which had to be contrived in order to clear a passage through the undergrowth of cycads, ferns, and creepers. The earth trembles, uprooted trees crash to the ground, the woods are filled with a monstrous noise of cracking, crunching, and trampling, and in the clearing giant creatures appear.

(This geological period comes to its end.)

The experiments are finished, nothing remains but to send all these absurd carcasses to the rubbish heap. The time has come to take a step forward and conquer this obsession

with the reptile which has definitely run its course and no longer meets the requirements of the situation. . . .

(Prâkṛiti amuses herself . . .)

She hides surprises, and puts riddles inside certain of her creations, as the cook sometimes bakes favors into birthday cakes.

Or at times she becomes bored, she plays the fool, she repeats herself stubbornly, she falls prey to all the abuses of industrial production, she overproduces the most ordinary articles at the expense of superior models; one would say that she can no longer stop herself. Or again, having evidently just received an order, she stops in the middle of her work as if she finds it too difficult, or has suddenly thought of something else. . . . She no sooner hears the word *Horse* than she produces that ridiculous little chess piece called a sea horse, which she drops into her aquarium. . . . She is told *Lizard*, and she makes an ichthyosaurus. . . .

(Now the preparations are made for the coming of Man.)

The rhythm of the seasons has been established, modern plant and animal life have been introduced and perfected, the voices of the birds are heard, all has been refashioned for man's use, to his scale, and in his image. It is the dawn of History, springtime in Paradise. "The flowers appear on the earth, the time of pruning the vines has come, and the song of the dove is heard, arise my beloved and come!" [Cant. 2:12]

This is the final touch, man who severs himself at last from the earth, definitively assumes his stature as a child of God, and takes his place in the Paradise of pleasure.

The myth of Prâkṛiti: *Figures*, 113–144, *et passim*.

## 65

### *The Coming of Man*

O superb creature, more beautiful than all the imitations of classical art, at once proportion, variety, volume, de-

sign, and harmony, whom your maker molded as if with perfumed hands! No, not molded, but called forth. All the elements rushed eagerly together from all sides at the scent of your fragrance. The sculptor works from the outside, whether he kneads the clay or carves the marble with great mallet-blows. But here the human creature, consisting of a soul and a body, yields to the touch of inner hands. At work on us are fingers more seductive than myrrh, and nothing in us can resist their pervasive influence. This odor of immortality has passed over us and left its lingering scent.

What are these fingers, you will ask, these hands at work on us whose impression we Christians never cease to feel? All that proceeds from the supreme Anointed One is unction,<sup>7</sup> and we, religious animals whom He quickens with His breath, are the recipients of His multiform sacrament: *Tu septiformis munere, digitus paternae dexteræ.*<sup>8</sup>

*Cantique*, 158

## 66

### *The Liturgy of Man and Nature*

In the inexhaustible lottery of the Infinite, God had already planned to win, to snatch between His fingers that little ball, our earth, and by breathing on it, make it the closed garden of His Beloved. Like an artist whose mind and hand separately, and one might almost say competitively, pursue the same design, God's justice throughout the six days was already plotting the means of making man the prisoner of His mercy. Already Space had infringed on Infinity and Time on Eternity, and Weight and Measure, which were pledged to His creature's profit, had fixed boundaries to His liberty.

An eye and a voice have wakened to take endless

<sup>7</sup> Christ; the word Christ in Greek means anointed. The reference is to His sacerdotal unction received at the Incarnation.

<sup>8</sup> Pentecostal text: *Veni Sancte Spiritus.*

notice of Him; a demand on Him has arisen which there is no possible way for Him to escape. Something has been born out of nothing, which can give Him an exposition of His goodness, its study, apprenticeship, and imitation. Something good has been born to tell Him in multiplicity and in harmony, in the rhythm of evening and morning, in appearance and disappearance—tell Him endlessly that He is better. On earth as in heaven, behold the Father can now no longer escape His own Word. The service, the chorus, the liturgy of nature has begun. Something with innumerable voices has been tuned harmoniously to tell Him that He exists. Something that is perishable reappears tirelessly to tell Him that He endures.

It is not enough. Above and beyond all this activity God has found for Himself someone in His image, someone in and above the universe whose function is to understand Him, to explain what He means, what He says, and what He does with regard to His Creation, to put Him to work, to make the most of Him, to guide Him, to add speech to song and meaning to ceremony. Behold Man.

*Accompagnements*, 137

## 67

### *Man Before the Creation*

In all that God has made we have nothing to scorn or reject; we have everything to understand. It is up to us to discover in each creature the mark of its Creator, of whose praise He has made it the faithful guardian. What it has to teach us of God, we must read from within (*intelligere*) and confront without prejudice but with respect, patience, and sympathy; not with the attitude of a judge or a superior, but as a brother, as St. Francis used to address himself to Brother Fire and Brother Wolf. The idea is not to turn nature over to artifice, but to set her on fire. The idea is to come to an understanding with her and to teach her why she was made. What is im-

portant is for every creature to make the most of its essential individuality, of what St. Denis calls its "dissimilitude."

*Positions II*, 198

## 68

### *Teaching God Through His Likeness*

The Creator is ever present within His creation, and it is through it that He speaks and tells us everything, not only the order and beauty of the universe in number, weight, and measure, over which preside the two great luminaries and the whole astronomical system, but the whole humble catechism of nature. The lily is purity; the lamb, obedience; the ox, patience; the hen, maternal love; the serpent, the deadly and invisible enemy; the weeds (and what variety!), evil thoughts that kill the garden, and falling leaves are all things that change and reappear.

All things arrive punctually for our instruction and welfare, our ordeal or punishment. When Job complains and blasphemes, God's only defense is to exhibit His works. What apparent connection is there between the Pleiades and this man on his dung heap, consumed by ulcers? And yet both live under the same watchful eye. And later Our Lord will tell us that He knows not only the number of His stars, but of His sparrows, and that not one hair can fall from our heads without His leave. Here is the primer of theology which should be taught to children and simple people before proceeding to the mysteries. "If thy eye be sound . . ." but it is God Himself who undertakes to teach us how to see.

*Ruth*, 77

## 69

### *The Splendor of Creation: The Stars*

When at the world's prow I consider that vast rice field, my lips begin to murmur the opening words of that first prayer which the good sister at Bar-le-Duc taught me to say:

"Our Father who art in Heaven," and the first verse of that great book to which I returned on the evening of my conversion, never to put it down again: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." And further on it is written, "The heavens declare the glory of God." Lips of fire on which tremble a story without end.

I lift my eyes to the zenith and in the vault I perceive a Giant, his foot on the Milky Way, delivering a sermon to the accompaniment of that dread millstone which he whirls round and round in his hands. I look to the west and there I recognize a million and a half throbbing maidens endlessly reciting the Rosary. My mind may wander elsewhere but I am sure to find you always in your places, O unwearying daughters!

. . . It is at once a timepiece and a paradise . . . it is a code whose key is everywhere, it is an exaltation and a choir, it is an equation and a city.

*Présence*, 245

## 70

Surrounded by this sea of blackness and of milk, my soul feels every porthole thrown open and everything rushes into it to raise the water level of joy. What do I care for the operations of algebra or the findings of physics? What knowledge and what pleasures are comparable to those told of in the Apocalypse and which the Latin text specifically calls calculations? They filled the hand of a Sower more prodigal than Hop-o'-my-Thumb. From pole to pole these unalterable specks describe the pathway which we are to take in pursuit of the pilgrim's staff of St. James. But what fascinates the beholder, what sends a holy shudder to the roots of his hair, is the prodigious activity which animates this swarm of bees, this arithmetical meadowland. It was the Seer Rimbaud who was the first to see "the shores of the sky all covered with these snowy nations of joy."

Although we no more understand their meaning than we do the social instincts of the anthill or the beehive, there are, in the infinite vastnesses of Space, nations busily engaged in an activity so strenuous that it seems as if we have only to cock our ears to hear a whir equal to the hum of a great metropolis. Pascal wrote, "I tremble before the eternal silence of these infinite spaces."

But how can one be afraid of a meadow? Is not a star as familiar to our hearts as a sprig of lily of the valley, as precious as a garnet? We have only to gather them. We have only to lift our eyes to read on all sides the proclamation of Peace. Why complain of an excess of riches? What does our timidity mean, if not a desire to limit them?

And I ask you, why speak of silence when I have only to be still to hear a Hallelujah and a chant, a poem and a Credo, a Hosannah and a Confiteor, and, caught in the vast coil of the explications of the Father, the cries of swallows and children and the sobbing of a woman wild with job? Silence indeed. The Psalmist is right when he tells us that "the heavens declare the glory of God," and Isaia when he implores the islands to be still. (*Taceant insulae ad me.*) Behold their kind of silence.

. . . I see the huntress Artemis with her bow, Venus like a green Psyche, a lamp in her hand, Mars all stained with the blood of sacrifice and, supreme among the Pleiades in the most crowded part of the firmament, Jupiter dispensing justice in his mantle caught with a purple sash. I never tire of gazing on this direct confirmation of movement in fixity, frozen for me by distance.

*Présence*, 298-301

## 71

### *Glory, the Prerogative of God*

Glory is the exclusive property of God, as we are told in the Epistle to the Romans: "To the only wise God, through

Jesus Christ, be honor forever and ever” [16:27] and in Isaia: “I am the Lord, my glory I give to no other.” [42:8]

This does not mean that He guards it jealously for Himself alone; every day at Mass we hear that heaven and earth are filled with His glory. But it does mean that He alone is its true dispenser, just as He alone is the object worthy of it . . . This is why we see Him in the Apocalypse crowned with many diadems while the twenty-four elders fall on their faces and cast their crowns at His feet. Although that crown belonged to Him by eternal right, He nevertheless chose to earn the right to wear it, for in the words of Isaia: “He has clothed me with a robe of salvation, and wrapped me in a mantle of justice” [referring to the flesh which He assumed] “like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem.” [61:10]

*J'aime*, 102

# And in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord

*L'Amour m'a désarmé, et mon Père ne m'est plus un rempart,  
Connaissez-vous enfin ce cœur que vous avez percé de part en part?*  
*Corona, 69*

“CHRIST is my only King, it is for Him that I fight, it is to Him that I have given my glove, it is to Him I would glorify and defend, repeating to His blind enemies the heart-rending cry of the aged Tertullian: ‘*Parce unicae spei, totius generis humanil’*”

So Claudel wrote to his correspondent André Suarès (*Corr.*

*Suarès, 160*) in the confident tone of a man of invincible faith. Further on he added, “There is only one truth, and that is to love Jesus Christ and to teach others to love Him, to give Him our poor miserable and lacerated hearts.” (*Ibid., 182*)

Who is this Christ, then, to whom the poet so resolutely dedi-

cated his life? The Church tells us: He is the Word incarnate, God made man. The very Son of God who, seeing into what a state of disorder sin had thrown the very good work of His Father, seeing what havoc it had wrought among men, freely offered Himself to put everything to rights by means of His incarnation and redemption.

Conceived of the Holy Spirit, He assumes flesh in the womb of the Virgin, receiving at that moment the sacerdotal unction which anoints Him High Priest of the Most High, Mediator between sinful humanity and His Father, King of the numberless multitude whom He comes to redeem by becoming the expiatory victim, Teacher of these ignorant men who walk in the shadow of error, Head of that Church which He has come to found, Doctor of the souls and bodies on which He is to lavish His benefits. In a word, the Messiah promised for long centuries by the prophets and, on the last day, Judge of the quick and the dead.

Amazing privileges accorded to a man, these are counterbalanced by the crushing weight of the redemptory anguish. His countenance is both supremely glorious and infinitely pitiful in which the extremes of beatitude and suffering meet without diminishing each other.

He is Alpha and Omega, the King of Kings, but also the Man of Sorrows humiliated even to

Gethsemane and Calvary, the Man-God, Saviour of the world.

Claudel speaks to us of his Saviour with a fervor that is now ecstatic, now compassionate.

“Behold Him who made the sun recoil,” he says, recalling Joshua, the figure who foreshadowed Him. His very glance has power: “One look from Him at Peter, at John and Andrew at their nets, at Matthew at his ledgers, at Bartholomew under the fig tree, was enough to appoint them Apostles.” (*Apocalypse*, 223) And above all, there is tender compassion for all human misery. “At the emanation of the Word all things are born, all things open, all things bare themselves, all things expand.” (*Ibid.*, 20)

What is His message? “It is not to make use of your eyes in order to see me, nor of your ears in order to hear me, nor of your legs in order to reach me, but of your hearts in order to love me.” (*Ruth*, 68) His task, Claudel says further on (*Ibid.*, 90), “is to reach into our heart of hearts. . . . He is a benefactor, a doctor who gathers together the wounded, the good shepherd in search of the lost sheep, the father who embraces the dishonored son!” (*Ibid.*, 91)

His aim is to reach the soul, and He prefers the simplest ways to do so. “The touch of a hand, the brushing of a garment, a bit of moistened earth applied to the locked eyelids” (*Poète*, 191), and all these cripples, these invalids,

these bedridden souls open, expand, and live. He works "like a fire, like a leaven, like a catalyst." (*Apocalypse*, 20) He is not come for the body alone, but for the soul, "not to fill our stomachs, but to inseminate our souls" (*Ibid.*, 322), to make them fruitful and ready for eternal life.

In His Eucharistic aspect which continues the Messianic life of Jesus, there is tenderness for all those who come to refresh themselves at His table. "His head is on my shoulder," says the poet in ec-

stasy, "it is damp, and I hold in my arms this shower of rain, tears, and hair. . . . It is the Creator in my arms, weeping for His creature." (*Rose*, 57) Claudel sings with joy of "the chalice of the Last Supper, that lip placed to a living, fluid God." (*Cantique*, 402) And what intimacy is revealed to us by this sentence which has escaped his enraptured heart, "Learn from me that you are no other than the vessel from which I wish to taste and drink in humanity." (*Cantique*, 271)

## 1

God, being unable to make Himself known, contrived to make Himself born.<sup>1</sup>

*Rose*, 73

## 2

### *The Son of God*

There is no crime greater than blasphemy. The Bible tells us that the specific charge brought against Christ was blasphemy, that is, the crime against the Deity itself, the attribution to the Deity of some quality that disparaged its majesty. What was this blasphemy? For answer we have the contemporary testimony of St. Paul. From the first historical evidence of any Christian, from the first undeniably authenticated conversion, that Christian believed that Christ was the Son of God. And if he believed that Christ was the Son of

<sup>1</sup> The point of this passage lies in a play on the words: *connaître* (to know) and *naitre* (to be born).—*Trans.*

God, it follows that Jesus Himself must have stated that He was.

. . . In the heart of the Jewish world, such a claim was something unprecedented and shocking. It was therefore absolutely necessary that Jesus prove the assertion, that He give impressive testimony of both His wisdom and power, that He produce proofs of Himself both by His sanctity and His miracles.

*Positions II, 162*

### 3

#### *Hypostasis*

The orthodox theory is that in the person of Christ there are two natures bound together in a substantial or hypostatic union and that, as our Credo asserts, He is at once true God and true Man. The human nature, consisting of a soul and a body, acts as the support of the divine nature which informs, pervades, feeds, and illumines it, marks it with its seal, and lends it life and intelligence. The same word which fathered Christ in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary continues to be the source of His existence after He is separated from her.

*Toi, 81*

### 4

#### *The Father Enthrones His Son*

Take it now, miraculous son! Take the world, says the prophet, [Daniel 7] take eternity! Ascend the throne of David, ascend the throne of Solomon, the one His mother prepared for Him and whose center is made of a beating heart! Become the center of all our scattered longing! At the intersection of the two diameters<sup>2</sup> verify that instrument which, from all six

<sup>2</sup> Divinity and humanity.—*Trans.*

directions, attracts everything to itself, by which justice has forever bound itself to love and where necessity has consumed death. In the center of all this has been driven a kind of nail to prevent my ever leaving again. It is love which has achieved this. There is a man who holds God fast by means of His Word.

*Ev. Isaie, 46*

## 5

### *The Coming of the Messiah*

The fulfillment has begun, the earth is pondering the signs, and from all directions the enlisted nations are on their way to Bethlehem. But today is the day I have promised Myself to celebrate all alone. Now nothing can prevent Me from being God! There is no longer any way to contain this heart which longs to give itself, this mind which longs to open and reveal itself utterly to those it loves, even to that mystic and unfathomable degree where Someone vows to Himself that He is a hidden God.

Look where He comes—even as He came on that great day of Grace and Glory when there rose on a light-drenched land a Sun which marveled at itself! The time has come; I feel them trembling within me, and soon I will no longer be able to contain them, those legions of saints unborn, that long roll call of names almost ready to be released, all those silent nations whom I already hear saying *Ave Maria*.

*Ev. Isaie, 137*

## 6

### *Incarnation*

There He is, for whom a heaven, suddenly swarming with all the notes of the antiphonal, offers the angels' impromptu chorus of *Gloria in excelsis*. It is He who made the

sun recoil and who tore from the mouth of the greatest of the prophets the names Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. It is only now, only today, that we can cry in truth, You are God among men!

*Ev. Isaie*, 162

## 7

By means of a wondrous ingenuity, and as a consequence of the perfect sanctity, simplicity, and innocence of one of His creatures, God has succeeded in overcoming the obstacle of the flesh. We read it every day at mass: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." And the Apostle announced with a cry of joy so great that all succeeding generations trembled: "What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes . . . and our hands have handled!" [I John 1:1]

God became man not to satisfy our vain curiosity but to lead us safely in the way of salvation.

*Toi*, 80

## 8

We have heard Man, in the person of Job, complain of his destiny, of his short career that in pain, sin, and ignorance leads from the cradle to the tomb. Well, it is this wretched and cramped condition that God, the Perfect, the ineffable Being, chose to take upon Himself with all humility and meekness. He asked a creature like us to share her heart with Him. He had need of her, and thanks to her an extraordinary Being appears in the midst of History who calls Himself not only the son of Man, but the Son of God.

*J'aime*, 18

## 9

*Reasons for the Incarnation*

Why did God become man? That it was partly out of pity for the sinful creature, we cannot doubt. But we have been taught, and firmly believe, that God is the first and the last, and that just as He is the Beginning, so also He alone is the supreme End of all.

If the Son became flesh it was not because it was in the Father's interests to become someone, but because it was in the Father's interests to do something. It is the service which explains the appearance of the Servant; it is the redemption which necessitated the incarnation. There was an order to be restored, the order which had been upset by the rebellion of Satan and his angels. It was necessary that from the profoundest depths of hell to the very summit of heaven there should no longer be any creature containing a single spark of the creative will who might escape the necessity of serving—serving God, serving some purpose of God's. It was necessary that God's work, begun in mercy, be accomplished forever in justice.

*Ev. Isaie, 26*

## 10

When God took possession of the human form, when He appropriated it for His own use, when He placed Himself within it in hypostatic union, He committed an unpardonable offense against justice, good sense, and propriety. Until the end of time, intellectuals will respond with alternating indignation and amusement. There are certain things which are simply not done. Let us therefore plant on the forked gibbet,<sup>3</sup> in the sight of heaven, for the edification of all ages, this transgressor caught in the very act of stealing back a possession which we had every reason to regard as exclusively ours.

<sup>3</sup> The cross.

In procuring from us the means to die, He robbed us of that right to annihilation which, since the original sin, has constituted the most obvious part of our basic capital. He embezzled our funds for His own profit. In one stroke He reclaimed for His Father all that cultivated estate which we considered ours by tenants' rights, under the terms of a hard-won agreement. This is why He deserved the name of Thief which He Himself officially assumed. Is it not written that "He who enters not by the door," where the devil mounts guard, "but climbs up another way is a thief and a robber"? [John 10:1]

Thanks to the complicity of the Virgin, there has been a stealthy raid on our nature. The damage is permanent, henceforth our walls are marred by a crack which for all our industry can never be mended again. "By the help of my God I leap over a wall," says the Psalmist. (17:30) Our homes are no longer our own.

*Poète, 104*

## 11

### *The Humiliations of the Incarnation*

It took God to perceive the extent of the harm inflicted on the Father, and it took a man to expiate it by means of that flesh which is his peculiar property. Oh, dull and heavy soul, try to open your eyes for one moment and see the Word in His Father's arms—in the very act of relating man to God. Behold this man in substantial union with God, in the process of earning his crown. . . .

It is no longer a case of Moses invited up to Sinai: it is we, on the contrary, who invite a certain beloved being to come down to us. *Utinam dirumperes coelos et descenderes*, we heard the prophet exclaim. "Make haste and come down," Jesus says later on to Zaccheus, hidden in the boughs of a tree. [Luke 19:5]

*Ev. Isaïe, 157*

## 12

It is in this state of annihilation, of total resignation, that the Lord of Sinai, on whose fulmination Moses could not have lifted his eyes without dying—the ineffable Being round whose throne the Seraphim can only blindly fly—it is in this form that He chose to come to the aid of His creature. He makes an act of faith. He places Himself naked in our arms, this little child from whom, according to St. Paul, all paternity springs. He no longer commands, He requests. He teaches us that it is He who needs us, His feeble hand seeks our hearts as best it can. He tries to arouse in us a fundamental and irresistible feeling of kinship.

One would say that He has forgotten that He is God and that it is only from our lips that He wants to learn it. He submits Himself to a human scale. God places Himself in the arms of His creature to be weighed and measured; and I, a man, support God. I hold Him, I sustain Him, I contain Him, I possess Him utterly, I carry Him in my arms.

*Ev. Isaïe, 44*

## 13

### *The Role of the Child of Bethlehem*

This Babe whom the Prophet hails with formidable names and a title reserved for God alone—did He come to take over the world by force, to establish a granite order based on a sort of geometry? He did not come to reshape from without, but to breathe from within. He came to create a need, a thirst which His disappearance will render unquenchable. And at the same time He came to bring the satisfaction of this need, to place the answer in our hands, to offer Himself as the sole remedy for this one fundamental craving of our nature which is its own gratification. He came to place Himself at our disposal, to join forces with us.

Son of God, He came to show us how to be sons of God.

*Ev. Isaïe, 26-27*

## 14

### *The Ransom of the Incarnation*

The ransom, I see now, is none other than Mary, this lily in an amphitheater of valleys, this lily fashioned for my delight! The ransom is none other than these stigmata of light within a miraculous cup, none other than the conception, in a mysterious gathering, of that fruit capable of redeeming all.

*Ev. Isaïe, 143*

## 15

### *Gentle and Meek of Heart*

It is no longer the God of Sinai who appears to us amid peals of thunder, torrents of black smoke, and terrifying blasts which rehearse the fanfare for the Last Judgment. It is a little child who stands among us, who has come bearing a childish lesson: God is love and there is no other commandment but to love God and your neighbor. Even today, if we listen after Communion, we will hear the sacred syllables leave those blessed lips which have imbibed the essence of butter and honey on the very breast of the Trinity. "But in the midst of you there has stood one whom you do not know." [John 1:26]

*Epée, 34*

## 16

### *God in Disguise*

One of the characteristics of Divinity is to be hidden, and Christ brought this characteristic with Him in His career

on earth. It is not His role to provide a ready-made truth but to elicit it, to draw it forth from those primordial depths of human nature. For example, He answers the messengers from John the Baptist not with words but with deeds, not by saying He is the Messiah but by being it. And when the time has come to found His Church, it is of herself, not out of flesh and blood but out of Peter's faith, out of this assent—this good will of the creature toward his Creator—that He will draw the necessary confession.

*Epée*, 35

## 17

### *The Promised Messiah*

“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him. If any man will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it.” [Deut. 18:18–19]

Dazzling words, triumphant words, worthy from the beginning to be gloriously inscribed on the banner of Christianity! Philip was not mistaken when he told Nathanael: “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets wrote, Jesus the son of Joseph of Nazareth.” [John 1:45] These are the very words, *delapsa de coelo*, which the three chosen Apostles are to hear echoing in their ears on the day of the Transfiguration. They are the words which form the theme of the first proclamation of the first Pope. [Acts 3:22] They are the words to which the first martyr testifies with his blood. [Acts 7:56]

*Emmaüs*, 150

## 18

### *Mediator*

Something has been placed in our hands with which we are able to measure the immeasurable. It is the God-Man;

with this finite we now may span the Infinite. That abyss that divided Heaven and Earth has been bridged, there is now a way across it. That many-runged ladder endlessly scaled by the angels which appeared to Jacob has its foot now fixed on that rock which is called the House of God, and its topmost rung is held in place by the very hand of the Almighty.

*Apocalypse*, 209

## 19

The pagan sees no pathway between God and Man, and despairs. The Christian has a deed from God, signed with the blood of Jesus Christ; he has definite rights, a belief and a trust.

*Corr. Rivière*, 64

## 20

### *His Power*

The Gospels show us the Saviour coming to the soul and imparting truth and virtue by the touch of a hand, the brushing of a garment, a bit of moistened earth applied to the locked eyelids. One look from Him is enough to make an Apostle out of that idler yawning under the fig tree—less time than it took to convince Nicodemus! Jesus did not always need a miracle or even a word. A tone or an inflection often served His purpose, and somehow the intervening gulf was bridged. The lost sheep recognized his master's voice and responded with a feeble bleat.

*Poète*, 191

## 21

His Name is Faithful and True, and He fights by means of Justice so that He is victorious not only when He judges, but when He is judged. [Psalms 50:6] From His mouth there

issues a two-edged sword which thrusts home, which finds the essence and lops off the incidental. The inviolable unity triumphs over multiplicity. He feeds His sheep, He sustains them with a law of iron, strict and unbreakable. His answer to Job's objections is the blood that covers His garment. And what may be called the dregs—error, falsehood, the unassimilable residuum—He tramples underfoot and leaves to ferment. He lets the guilty conscience beneath His feet taste and digest its own crime; this sugar turns to alcohol, that is, becomes fuel for the flame.

*Emmaüs*, 225

## 22

He is come, the One before whom all powers on earth, in heaven, or in hell are obliged to bend the knee, and on whose garment and flank is inscribed this name: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." [Apoc. 19:16]

"I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I, but that it be kindled?" [Luke 12:49] The eyes and face of Christ are a silent answer to that universal human longing to do away with the old self, to exhale the substance through the soul, and to illumine our whole estate with the conflagration of that heart on which the Spirit breathes.

*Emmaüs*, 225

## 23

### *His Sovereignty*

Christ is like King Solomon at whose feet all the nations of the earth lie down and unfold their wealth, that he may wed the amber of the Baltic with the ivory of Ethiopia. [II Paralipomenon 9:24]

*Présence*, 104

## 24

### *The Power of His Gaze*

It is Christ's eyes on us, and our eyes turned toward Him as a servant toward his master which brings about our participation and our understanding. One look from Him at Peter, at John and Andrew at their nets, at Matthew at his ledgers, at Bartholomew under the fig tree, was enough to appoint them Apostles, to brand on them indelibly that new name—the name of their Master.

*Apocalypse, 223*

## 25

### *The World Belongs to Christ*

All things created exist to bear witness to their Creator, that is, to contribute some means of making Him known, to translate Him into concrete terms. We may respectfully assume that this is what is meant in the language of the Gospel by the word "glorify." "All things that are mine are thine," we are told by the Word made flesh, "and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." [John 17:10]

Now we know that all things in heaven and earth belong to the Son of God, and consequently their only purpose is to manifest Him, whether symbolically through their form, or in parable, through their behavior.

*Poète, 211*

## 26

Learn from Me that you are no other than the vessel from which I wish, in humanity, to taste and drink.

*Cantique, 271*

## 27

*His Magnetism*

Something in us is drawn with irresistible force to that Voice which rehearses today those sounds with which it will tomorrow take command over death and the tempest.

*Epée*, 34

## 28

*His Love on Calvary*

Look, then, to what You have been reduced, and see to what extremity Your mercy has let itself be led by Your justice! Neither the Angels nor Your Father's arms nor the breast of the Trinity were able to restrain you. On the very brink of this act by which all things exist, He found no way to defend Himself from the shaft of Love!

*Poète*, 144

## 29

*The Miracle Worker*

We hear Christ tell the scribes and Pharisees that He has not come for the well but for the sick, and He gives a list which is confirmed on every page of the Gospel: the blind, the deaf, the leprous, the palsied and the lame. These are the ones whom the disciples are to recruit by the wayside; it is through them that Christ makes His way with one miracle after another.

And yet these physical infirmities are merely the outward image of moral sickness. To read the Bible literally, one would even think that God's love for us increases in direct proportion to our shortcomings, that He is grateful to us for

this cross which we ask Him to bear because it closes the distance from Him to us.

*Emmaüs*, 238

## 30

### *The Miracle of His Grace*

He did not come to give us a life which would serve only to enable us to die. He did not come on earth to prevent hunger and thirst. He did not come to fill our stomachs but to inseminate our souls. He came with His great leaven so that no stone might be incapable of becoming wheat or loaf. Such is the miracle of grace, such is this amalgam of love and longing which no stone has the power to resist.

*Apocalypse*, 322

## 31

### *The Sweetness of His Love*

He knows the sweetest words of love, He murmurs them into the ears of our poor ravished souls. He has aroused in us a new kind of hunger. All these words, all these parables, are our food. We taste them, we roll them around on our tongues. They are not food for the mind alone; the whole man—heart, stomach, senses, imagination, memory—is sustained by them. We receive something that completes and confirms intuition, a state of becoming. Since there is a good shepherd, why would we not be His sheep?

*Ruth*, 92

## 32

### *How He Touches Hearts*

Jesus' preaching addresses itself not only to the outer man but to the inner. His task is to reach the heart of hearts.

It is not just His power which He must display, as when he changes water into wine, multiplies the loaves, calms the sea. There are all those hard hearts, those hearts of stone which He must soften and melt by planting in them the spark of love and ridding them of the scab of habit and the ulcer of sin.

This is why His whole campaign up to the very end is a profusion of good deeds; it is the suffering flesh which must be won over first. He gives sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. He straightens the palsied, He purifies the lepers, He drives out unclean spirits, He feeds the starving—if necessary He even raises the dead; but more wonderful still, He forgives sins! He knows that we cannot help loving someone who is good to us, and if it is through God that this good is done, well, perhaps we will begin to love God a little and to obey Him, for it is clear and evident that in this way lies salvation.

*Ruth, 90*

### 33

He who fashioned our minds and placed our hearts in our breasts, does He not possess the skill to lure them forth and make them vibrate? This is why, as a wise sorcerer, He presents Himself to us in all the forms most likely to rouse and win our confidence, our love, and our need. He is not only the benefactor, He is the doctor who gathers up the wounded, He is husband, father, and brother, He is the good shepherd in search of the lost sheep, He is the father who embraces the dishonored son. He is the friend of women and children, the refuge of fools and sinners, the brother and the son in whom is realized the role of the ancient Joseph. He is the servant of servants, the miser who turns His greed and anxiety to the search for souls. He is the last resort, He is the master to whom all things are possible and in whom there is no longer anything to fear: He is a little child.

*Ruth, 91*

### 34

God thirsts only for God. The Son of God desires only His Father. Man, the representative of all creatures, hungers only for his Maker. But God, looking down on His whole creation, needs also whatever belongs to Him, whatever loves Him, whatever speaks to Him.

*Poète*, 120

### 35

#### *The Saviour*

“The Kingdom of God is within you,” the Gospel tells us; *within*. And so it follows that in Christ, the Word incarnate, every member is word and salvation: not only the hand that raises the dead and hurls thunderbolts and the foot before which all obstacles disappear, but also that which is within. We are to eat the Passover lamb, we are told in Exodus, “roasted whole, with its head and shanks and inner organs.” [Ex. 12:9] Now Israel, obeying the prescriptions of Sinai, has long been familiar with this visceral side of life; for a long time the high priests have been tirelessly probing the human body and working with its organic structure. And now that the Saviour is here and we see that He cures deafness with His saliva, what are we to say of His tears and His blood? To this very day we are on Calvary, where the centurion’s lance opened in His side the inexhaustible fount of the sacraments.

*Sophie*, 112

### 36

#### *Fountain of Life*

Just as He affects each individual simply by virtue of His presence, so Christ acted and continues to act on human

society as a fire, a leaven, and a catalyst, as a temptation, as an invitation to passion and to thought, as a hidden source of life and power which has never ceased to be everywhere present. At the emanation of the Word all things are born, all things open, all things bare themselves, all things expand, all things ripen, all things become aware of their reason for being.

*Apocalypse, 20*

## 37

### *The Signs or Miracles of Christ*

These signs, which constitute His answer to the disciples of John the Baptist, are a beginning, they are the foundation He lays: a violation of reason, of the order of things, of the Sabbath. Wherever He passes, nothing remains the same. The whole structure threatens to collapse. Society has been dealt a blow, logic has been dealt a blow, common sense has been dealt a blow. And now I must teach you not to make use of your eyes to see me, nor of your ears to hear me, nor of your legs to reach me: but of your hearts to love me. And if your eye offends you, do not hesitate to pluck it out. [Matt. 5:29]

*Ruth, 68*

## 38

### *He Fulfills the Scriptures*

When He makes His tour of the synagogues, what is He doing but manifesting Himself within the law and the prophets as a living reference? *Ecce venio*. You have been told such and such, He declares in the Sermon on the Mount, but I have come to tell you something altogether different. Constantly recurring in the Gospel are the words, ". . . that the Scriptures may be fulfilled." When His disciples try to

persuade Him not to accept His Passion, He answers, "How then are the Scriptures to be fulfilled?"

He never deviates from them. To the triple temptation of the devil His answer is, "it is written." His last words on the cross are a quotation from the Psalms. And when, after the resurrection, He meets the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, His whole message consists of opening to them the Scriptures which contain Him. When He appears to the two apostles on the mountain, He appears between Moses and Elias, and His transfiguration is the clarification and outward illumination of a hitherto obscure scriptural passage.

*Ruth, 88*

## 39

### *He Completes the Old Testament*

The Old Testament only succeeds in stammering the first letter of the sacred name, which is also the first letter of the alphabet: A, A, A, and it is only the Son who is given the power to complete the name and to place it in our mouths in its perfect form: "*Abba!* Father! Our Father who art in Heaven!"

*Ruth, 90*

## 40

### *Sower of God's Word*

God who became a seed in the womb of the Blessed Virgin came to us for no other reason than to become a sower. He calls Peter, John, Andrew, Judas, and the other Apostles by their own names, and He lets Himself be drawn aside personally by the bedridden woman, the man with a hemorrhage, by all sorts of invalids and persons possessed of devils. But on the whole He scatters this grain, with which His sack is bursting, with His eyes shut, He scatters it at random, at the

mercy of the four winds. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." [Matt. 11:15]

There are stony places, there is the roadway where the ground has been hardened by the feet of passersby, there are thorns and other weeds, there are the fowls of the air and the bad weather. But there is also the good ground, the fertile soil which is conscience, concern, understanding—husbandry.

*Ruth*, 100

## 41

I have not come to bring you paradise here and now, Christ tells us, I have come to bring you the horizon, the sea, that is to say, freedom, that body which never overflows although all the rivers flow into it without ceasing. [Cf. Eccles. 1:7] I have come to bring you the desire and the direction, that secret understanding, throughout your travels, of your destination. "It runs over, like the Euphrates, with understanding." [Sirach 24:24] To the burden that weighs you down, I have added longing . . . "You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect." [Matt. 5:48]

At last, the very commandment I was waiting for! To become intolerant of imperfection is to be perfect already.

*Ruth*, 105

## 42

### *Christ's Paradoxes*

When one reads the Gospels one is struck by the harsh, violent, hyperbolic, paradoxical, and sometimes apparently contradictory style in which the divine Preacher often addresses His audience. He even goes so far as to say, as if boastfully: "This is a hard saying." Far from trying to win agreement, He strikes with His terrible right hand and says nothing.

A fig tree refuses to yield its fruit in the month of March; He curses it and lo, the tree withers to its roots. "I am bread, I am wine," He says. This is no figurative saying. It is the truth.

The Pharisees demand explanations and He offers none. He only repeats and insists; He presents a truth which is inseparable from the image. To illustrate divine justice He gives the example of reapers who are paid the same wage for several hours of work or for only one. He praises the disloyal steward. He seems to recommend usury. He warns us that He demands what does not belong to Him, that He reaps where He has not sown. He tells us that He has not come to bring peace but the sword, that He has come to teach us to hate our kin, to leave our families and our native soil. And we must not resist evil: we must turn the other cheek, go three leagues when asked to go one.

All this, if one reads literally, must be done without reservation, against reason and common sense, at the risk of scandal and the neglect of our most immediate duties. The small-minded—who are usually called strong-minded, the modern Sadducees—can only snicker; it must be admitted that even the simple-minded are at a loss.

*Ruth, 102*

## 43

Of course He intended to outrage the Pharisees, but at times it seems as if the whole purpose of His mission was to scandalize the entire world. He dares, He defies. He is careful to state that the rock on which He means to found His Church is a "rock of scandal." And as St. Paul points out, what mystery could be more outrageous, more shocking, more offensive to reason, good sense, and the instinct of self-preservation than that concept which perplexed even the Angels—of a God (yes, God, author of all things, master of worlds out of mind!) become man, become flesh, become a

worm, spat upon, trampled underfoot, and finally crucified between two thieves, bound, bruised, crushed, and drained of the last drop of His life and blood!

"It's charming!" the lady says, adjusting her lorgnette before a painting of the Crucifixion.

Behold someone to whom everything happened by way of parable, in a color scheme divorced from reality.

*Ruth*, 103

## 44

But the real man, though superficially shocked, is nevertheless glad at heart, or more accurately, enchanted. What if his deep-seated habits have been challenged? Without being able to identify the truth, he feels its sting, feels the home-thrust which can only be made under cover of dark. God does not enter by the door but by scaling the wall. He goes right to the heart. There are regions in man's soul which he had believed to be inaccessible, and now, suddenly, he feels stirring within him that truth which lies deeper than justice. He reels, he is torn, he is tormented, he becomes leavened dough, he has received one of those blows which compel one to respond. If there is a door, he studies the door-posts, not one but both, not just the one that permits the folding leaf to turn, but the other, the one that allows the door to close precisely. "Happy the man watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts." [Prov. 8:34]

These are the posts which the Angel has stained with the blood of the Lamb.

*Ruth*, 104

## 45

### *His Most Precious Gift, the Eucharist*

Lord, we say every morning as the priest places the host between our lips, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst

enter under my roof. And so I beseech You not to tell me who You are, pretend not to tell me Your formal name; the only one I want to hear is not composed of letters or any breath of the mouth but of a thrust to the heart. . . .

His head is on my shoulder, it is damp, and I hold in my arms this shower of rain, tears, and hair! And it came to pass that the Shepherd had need of His flock, that it might comfort Him a while.

It is the Creator in my arms weeping on His creature, it is the Redeemer in my arms asking me to reckon His worthlessness, it is the Consoler who is without consolation.

*Rose, 57*

## 46

Every morning this abyss opens between our lips, between our teeth, this tongue rises, fervent flower of the spirit within, and every morning the Son of Man, the Judge, the Husband, the Father, the Master, the Doctor, and the Victim humbly and majestically enters us in the liquefaction of our substance and the trembling of our very being. There is not one of these invasions, not one of these vital confrontations, not one of these fusions with our living sap, which has not left its traces in our souls, though unperceived of our senses. Look, Lord, I pray, on this threshold worn with your constant footsteps. You are like the miser who comes every day to inspect His hoard.

*Cantique, 321*

## 47

Through this temporal sacrament, we commune with Christ who is eternal. It is not He who leaves His dwelling place, it is the veil of this world which is rent. It is we who are in a sense freed by Him from time and space.

*Positions II, 62*

## 48

The lamb is to be "roasted whole," it is written in the Book of Exodus. You will assimilate Him completely. No longer will you merely feast your eyes. No longer will you satisfy your curiosity but satisfy your soul; no longer feed your mind but your faith; no longer yearn for your instruction but for your construction. "*Christianus alter Christus.*" To teach us to become Christians and to say not "I live," but "Christ lives in me," Jesus offers Himself to us completely, body and soul. He presents us with His own key, He teaches us to imitate in our secret lives all that is done by the Christ in Him, He yields Himself to our touch with a tact infinitely more delicate and more thorough than that of the saint's fingers when they probed the open wound.

*Positions II, 64*

## 49

In this material world, the Eucharist is the greatest of mysteries. In penetrating it, the senses are of no use whatsoever. Our Lord is so well hidden in the sacrament that even His mother's eye would not recognize Him.

. . . The Christ who exists today beneath the appearances of bread and wine is Christ in all His fullness, risen in all His glory, and seated at the right hand of His Father. He is no longer the seed, which is the suffering body, but the mature fruit, which is the glorified body, the spiritual body, the first born among the dead, luminous, quick, subtile, impossible.

. . . Let us note one thing, however: this mystery which confounds our minds is accepted by our hearts immediately and unreservedly as something simple and easy, a gift as supremely fitting as it is gratuitous. Our stomachs do not receive bread more eagerly than our hearts, anticipating our sluggish reason and rushing ahead of it, go out to the Euchar-

ist. Our hearts go without doubts and with a voracity and violence of longing as toward some food which our whole being craves. Nature ennobled by grace, deaf to our arguments, confronts her Creator with a passion which disconcerts us. Here is the exact antithesis of philosophical justifications which take place outside us and which the inner heart is slow to accept. Here is a moment when being speaks directly to being.

*Positions II*, 58–59

## 50

“Eye has not seen nor ear heard . . . what things God has prepared for those who love him.” [I Cor. 2:9] Perhaps not the eye or the ear—but St. Paul says nothing about the tongue! What three years of communal living failed to teach the Apostles, the chalice of the Last Supper, when lip is placed to a living, fluid God, revealed to them at last.

*Cantique*, 402

## 51

Jesus, my life!

*Private journal; unpublished*

# Born of the Virgin Mary

*Salut, Vierge à genoux dans la splendeur,  
Première-née entre toutes les créatures.*

*Corona*

THIS woman, unique in all the world, is celebrated throughout Clauzel's writings with incomparable tenderness, wonder, and enthusiasm.

Let us briefly review the Church's doctrine with regard to Mary.

*Her prerogatives:* The Immaculate Conception which, from the

first moment of her conception, preserved her from any stain of sin; her perpetual Virginity before, during, and after the conception of the Son of God; her divine Motherhood which permitted her to bring into the world, through the action of the Holy Spirit, a man who is also God. Mother of God, she is also mother of man-

kind, which is what Jesus meant when He pointed her out to John as his Mother. She had a real role in our redemption, by virtue of her acceptance of, and total participation in, the Passion of her Son; with her assumption into heaven, she continues to bring men to Jesus until the end of time.

This humble child of Nazareth is the fulfillment of what was written in Genesis, when, after the fall of Adam, God tells the serpent that He will "put enmity between him and the woman." [3:15] Isaia hails her from afar: "Behold the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son" [7:14], and the Apocalypse pictures her as giving birth in heaven, pursued by the dragon.

Claudel calls her "a living Bible." (*J'aime*, 117) She was present in the mind of God when He created the world, and she always had an underlying role throughout the history of Israel.

The Gospel shows her at the Annunciation, at the Visitation, at all the episodes of Jesus' boyhood from His Nativity to the marriage at Cana, through Calvary and the Pentecost.

For Claudel, Mary, the Church, and the human soul are images which constantly overlap and intersect in Scripture. What is said of one may often be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the other two. Take, for example, the Angel's phrase, *full of grace*. Strictly speaking, it refers to Mary, but it may also be applied to the Church

and to the soul redeemed by the blood of Christ. It is in this triple perspective that one must read the major work Claudel devoted to the Mother of God, his commentary on the Canticle of Canticles.

She is this lily "for whom the Holy Spirit provided the pollen" (*Cantique*, 265), and this "golden mansion which has ever been open to the light of Nazareth and of Calvary." (*J'aime*, 103)

There is enchanting simplicity in that scene between Mary and Joseph when he is thinking of sending her away. "She says nothing, he says nothing." Doubt gnaws the heart of this righteous man who does not understand the mystery. And when the Angel has enlightened him he looks at her; tears roll down his grey beard, and from his lips issue the words: "Hail, Mary, full of grace." (*Rose*, 141)

Then it is the hour of the Nativity. Here, too, Claudel skillfully recreates the scene in the stable at Bethlehem in captivating detail; but he goes beyond the surface to reflect on the action of the Holy Spirit on this immaculate creature from whom it must "extirpate" a Man-God. "It pounces on this human prey." Did the Angel not say that "the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee"? "Burst forth," says the Third Person to the Second." Now it is over for her: "the fullness of Motherhood and the resting place of the Deity." (*Rose*, 117, 118) She was

chosen "to bring forth the Sun, and all Space is filled with her Splendor." (*Cantique*, 293)

The joys of childbirth are followed by the thorns of Calvary. "For the sword touches our very soul," Jeremiah had said,<sup>1</sup> [4:10] and Mary "welcomed it and treasured it in all her heart." (*Epée*, 76) She is its sheath. (*Ibid.*, 89) But she is strong, she remains in the name of the Church and contemplates her Beloved as He hangs on the instrument of His victory. "For her this is not the moment to weep, but to take a

lesson in catechism." (*Ibid.*)

But now it is the hour of the Assumption, when Mary "scatters in the sky a pathway of roses." She is that Esther of whom it was written that "all the stars that are kindled do not suffice to hold up her train." (*Rose*, 145)

The splendor of the Virgin and her role in the Church have been sung by Claudel with a lyricism that is fresh, delicate, or ecstatic. Truly it was not in vain that he gazed upon "that resplendent Sister who assails us with her Christ-bearing virtue." (*Rose*, 221)

## 1

### *Mary, Vehicle of the Promise*

The promise was not given to man but to woman. It is to her that petition must be made, it is in her womb that the seed of redemption germinates. As she was the instrument of the fall—*felix culpa!*—she is the proprietress of salvation. It is her duty to justify to God that creation which, through her, was severed from Him. Generation follows generation, and at last on our disinherited soil there springs forth amid the thorns the precious lily of the Immaculate Conception. When man falls, it is to her (and she was not absent when he was pulled from the mire) that God turns to remake man in His image. It is to her that He chooses to surrender Himself as spiritual prisoner of His own clay.

*Accompagnements*, 140

<sup>1</sup> However, in the version with which Claudel was familiar: "The sword will drink your blood even unto drunkenness; it will devour you whole."—Trans.

## 2

*Israel Waits for Mary*

For centuries no man will look upon a virgin without secretly wondering: Is it you, or must we wait for another?

*Emmaüs*, 150

## 3

*The Incarnation*

The artist studies his unfinished work, he contemplates this stainless lily which must be extricated from the thorns and the mud, this sacred mouth which is capable of pronouncing the supreme *Fiat* in an attitude of patience, piety, compassion, understanding, supplication, and counsel. There must be nothing pure in human nature that does not share in this fruition, and nothing impure that does not share in this purification.

*Emmaüs*, 291

## 4

From the Angel of Paradise to the Angel of the Apocalypse, who swears that time is no more, from the Angels who flog Heliodorus to the one who guides the child Tobias, from the Angel who consoles Hagar to the one who delivers St. Peter, all sacred history is visited by these formidable, instructive, and sympathetic brothers. But the culmination of their ambassadorial functions is Gabriel's announcement to the Virgin of Nazareth that "she has found grace with God" and that "the power of the Most High shall overshadow her."<sup>2</sup> [Luke 1:30, 35]

*Présence*, 257

<sup>2</sup> The bride of the Canticle of Canticles, the image of Mary.

**5**

I am a garden, says the Sulamite. From Eden to Nazareth, I have been this garden which He requires. In Mary and Joseph He married the lily with the lily. I am all these lilies in one. They form a single stalk and a single glorious corolla for which the Holy Spirit will ever provide the pollen.

From my whiteness, He has taken milk, from my stamens, He has taken gold, from my perfume, he has taken honey. My beloved is mine and I am His. In my arms He drinks in all Humanity, that He may find nourishment.

*Cantique, 265*

**6**

The Canticle of Canticles tells us the power of this Sulamite, the power of "a single bead of her neck," when we but follow her. What will be the power of her face? Or of a direct glance from her eyes, those eyes that disturbed the Trinity itself, and invited it to create the world? What will be the power of that mouth which, when it opened to say Yes robbed the Word of the power to breathe?

*Rose, 23*

**7*****Mary and Joseph at Nazareth***

This screeching of plane and saw; it is Joseph in his workshop: the crack of raw lumber, the ring of a broken vase; Mary is there. Morning, noon, and evening they pray together, sometimes they sing; they eat from the same plate at the same table, they divide the chores between them . . .

And one day, suddenly . . . Mary and Joseph look at each other, he guesses the truth, and she sees that he has

guessed. She says nothing and he says nothing. "But Joseph her husband, being a just man, was minded to put her away privately." [Matt. 1:19]

Behold the first thrust to that pure heart, the prelude to the Seven Sorrows of the divine office. Behold the humiliation which serves as a stepping stone for her whom we call Queen of Heaven and Queen of Angels. Notice how she ushers God into the world: in secret, as an intruder, under suspicion. And watch this righteous man who must be sacrificed, first victim of Him who said that He had not come to bring peace, but the sword. What can she do? Her lips are sealed; it is not in her power to breathe the Word which is there within her.

He who becomes the friend of God must be prepared for surprises. It is not Judas, it is my love, my beloved wife, bound to me by a tie stronger than marital love, who has betrayed me. In his pain, he hurriedly devises a plan.

There is something strange in the atmosphere; some new element has been introduced which works against the carrying out of that decision he reached so sorrowfully. Joseph has now the feeling that if he sent this woman away, it would be he and not she who would be excluded.

And then occurs the event of which we are told in the Gospel: An angel appears to him in a dream, the angel of the Annunciation, we may be sure. And it is the very scene of the Annunciation, for all the explanation he is given! Good God, he has understood!

A day, two days pass. And on the third day Mary does not rise from the table; she lingers there, looking at her husband. She does not look at his eyes, she looks at his lips. His eyes are closed and tears are rolling down over his grey beard. His lips are moving, they begin silently to form that first salutation which passed from the mouth of the Angel to that of a priest: *Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.*

## 8

*Nativity*

The days are accomplished, and it is Christmas night. Look, here is this chance refuge, this stable which provides a makeshift shelter for these two comrades, these two four-footed attendants, the ox and the ass. . . . The ground has been tidied up a bit, and the few poor belongings that were brought have been unpacked; they do not amount to much. To one side, carefully laid out as in a vestry, is the baby's modest linen: the shirt, the leading string. The angel told them not to bother with anything more.

But since one must eat, husband and wife have shared a bit of old bread. The lantern has been hung in a corner, where it gives a queer sort of light. Joseph is sitting down, he is silent; he has not far to travel before he will find the company of the Eternal and that profound instructor whose daily concern is to teach him the word Yes.

The Virgin is also seated, and if you were to assure me that she kneels for a moment, I would ask no more. I watch her: she is calm, her eyes are closed, and it is more than enough for me to be here without wanting to be seen. Except for the breathing and the vague stirring of the animals, there is no sound. A moment ago the ass indulged in a terrible fit of braying which seemed to go on forever, a clamor that shook heaven and earth. It was some time before silence was restored. Nevertheless, the time passes: an hour, two hours, and each is distinguished by an increased solemnity. Joseph's heart repeats the psalms. He understands, he trembles: a certain verse in Hebrew characters appears to him with sweet authority, and another—look, he begins to weep—takes its place, bearing the irrefutable Word!

O my God, then it is true? This is to be placed in my heart, in my arms? I, the heir of Abraham and Jacob and

Judas and David! I have been chosen to be the witness, and more than the witness, you say, the father! "Jesus himself . . . being—as was supposed—the son of Joseph." [Luke 3:23]

*Rose*, 114

## 9

It is Mary who was chosen to be the victim of the great Incongruity. The time has come for the Holy Spirit to rush at this human prey and exact this Man-God which He must have. There must be an uprooting, the stalk must be torn—a life for a life, a self for a self, a heart for a heart. Something is pierced deeper than our bowels. How are we to believe that this violence could be accomplished without the agony of nature—if not physical, at least spiritual? <sup>8</sup> *Eructavit cor meum verbum Verbum bonum*, says the Psalms. It is time for barrenness to be finished and the desire of all the earth to be accomplished. It is time for the arrow to fly from the drawn bow. It is time for Samson to tear himself with a mighty effort from that temptress who held him prisoner.

*Rose*, 117

## 10

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole soul, with thy whole strength," says the Commandment. But now it is no longer enough to love Him, to contemplate Him; now we must bring Him forth from our vitals, we must bring Him into the world, we must expel this incomprehensible Word!

Mary desires the will of God with all the strength in her sinews, with all the passion in her bones! I speak figuratively, because not for a moment do I think that her chastity

<sup>8</sup> Claudel does not mean that the Blessed Virgin was subject to the law of the daughters of Eve who must bring forth their young in pain.

sustained any injury; and yet the severing of this mother and this Son was not done lightly or innocuously, as a ray of light penetrates a piece of glass. Now for the first time she understands the meaning of those words which will be spoken to her later, at the marriage at Cana: "Woman, what is that to me and to thee?"

Now there must be a dividing of their substance. She is abandoned and empty, there is no longer for her the fullness of Motherhood and the resting place of the Deity. It is not until the evening of the Last Supper that she will regain that fullness, which she will then share with all the guests at the Holy Table. No longer will a single soul serve two beings.

*Rose*, 118

## 11

### *The Flight into Egypt*

Mary fled with her child in her arms, thus inaugurating that hegira, that state of suspense, that vigilance, that constant readiness for escape which will characterize the Church until the end of time.

*Epée*, 20

## 12

### *The Mother of Sorrow*

That flesh-eating sword which Jesus Himself said He came to bring to mankind and which St. John saw issuing from His mouth, that infinitely destructive weapon which is one of the forms of the Holy Spirit, Mary welcomed for all time and stored in her heart. Of her own free will she appeased its hunger; she betook herself in the name of all mankind to meet its Justice. And wielded by an unerring hand, "the sword touches our very soul." [Jer. 4:10]

*Epée*, 76

## 13

### *The Descent from the Cross: Jesus Restored to His Mother*

And now the moment more bitter than aloes: Jesus is delivered into His Mother's arms. He is dead. The dagger is buried finally and forever in that heart which was destined to become its sheath. Now it is no longer her eyes which watch, which understand, and give evidence. This Jesus, who was just on the cross, has been again laid in her arms. She embraces Him, she holds Him, she supports Him, she contains Him. At last it is hers, this lifeless body from which the soul has fled—her Son and her God. She holds it in her lap.

Here is the first moment of complete possession which has been granted her since the days of Bethlehem and Nazareth, a moment of perfect union between the consummated Christ and this woman who is the Church, now confirmed forever in her maternal ordination. And surely we cannot think that those lips which He offered to Judas and chastised Simon for not seeking are now denied His mother. For now He depends on her alone, He has been placed completely in her hands—length, breadth, and weight—this Christ whom she has just watched being unfastened limb by limb from that rigid framework which held Him fixed to the ancient Law.

*Electe ramos, arbor alta!* Now it is she who is the cross: she has become the scale on which is weighed that “eternal weight of glory” [II Cor. 4:17] before which, unlike Moses, she does not shrink. It is she who will henceforth be the human stalk and stem of this Christ five times opened.<sup>4</sup> He is her impression, and she is his expression.

*Epée, 89*

<sup>4</sup> That is, once for each of his five wounds.—*Trans.*

## 14

*The Significance of Mary at Calvary*

While God created the world, our Mother was there singing and rejoicing in His presence, and now that He has completed His work is it not right that she be there too, and that mingled with the cry of her torn heart should be heard the strain of the *Magnificat*? As she rejoiced on the first day, so must she smile on the last, for the day of the consummation of Jesus Christ is that of the fulfillment of Mary.

*Epée*, 86

## 15

*Assumption*

At one time the Word descended to her, but now it is she who rises. After the bitter delay exacted by necessity, she can no longer avoid ascension.

She has risen, and yet the high position she enjoys among the blessed has robbed her of none of her faculty of aspiration: without withdrawing, she never ceases to rise still higher, to give expression and gratification to the longing and straining of the whole Universe toward its efficient and final cause. Through her, as a smoke which dissolves into a scent, is achieved the release and flight of all that throughout the ranks of vegetable, animal, and spiritual nature fosters the ability to ascend. From the very beginning, says the Prophet, before anything was created, she rejoiced.

Yes, even in the dense chemical mists of the age of fossils, her sacred image played before the eye of God.

*Cantique*, 24

## 16

Mary has occupied her place in the sun, and now it is a pathway to the sun which she scatters in the sky behind

her like a waste of roses. "Had I but wings like a dove, I would fly away," says the Psalmist. [54:7] It is Mary, precisely, who will give these wings to us. For what is the rose with its whorl of petals but an arrangement of wings? And it is wings that the Apostles, gathered from the four corners of the earth, found in His sepulchre in place of the sacred body.

*Rose*, 145

## 17

Behold, that cloud in which the Eternal chose to wrap Himself on Sinai and in which Moses was engulfed has been torn to shreds by our Mother. *Concidisti saccum meum.*

She scatters it in the blue in fiery bursts of red and gold! *Dispersit dedit pauperibus!* There is enough for all! Everyone gets a scrap! There is no willow-shaded pool which does not receive its little rag of crimson, nor a divinity student under the old avenue of lime trees without his verse of Scripture. The Rhone below translates in a turbulence of spirals and eddies that heavenly queen clothed in variety, that Esther for whom all the stars do not suffice to hold up her train.

*Rose*, 145

## 18

### *Mary's Beauty*

She is the full moon, that nocturnal resplendence, that witness forever powerless to avert her face or her confession from the One she loves. But she is more than a reflection, however pure. She is the chosen sun, the "woman clothed with the sun" mentioned in the Apocalypse [12:1] who marches from hill to hill like an army in battle formation, under the command of love, and who appears at last on the farthest range of the horizon, glowing, with sword in hand.

*Epée*, 9

**19**

One can resist force, skill, or self-interest. One can even resist Truth, but one cannot resist Beauty, holding Innocence in her arms.

*Ev. Isaïe*, 316

**20**

Do we not read in the Book of Kings that the glory of the Lord fills God's house? What shall we say, then, of that golden mansion which has ever been open to the light of Nazareth and Calvary? Gold belongs to God, says the prophet Aggai [2:8], but Mary herself is all gold, she is all crystal, she is all reflection, she is all purity, she is all fidelity. It is she whom the Canticle of Canticles compares to the moon, the full moon, *immaculata*. She borrows the beam of light but reserves nothing for herself; yet it would be wrong to say that, like the snowy sentinel of our nights, she throws it all away. On the contrary, we are told that Mary takes all those things which she has received from God and ponders them in her heart, and that all the glory of the King's Daughter comes from within.

*J'aime*, 102

**21**

It was Mary who was chosen to bring forth the Sun, and all space is filled with her splendor.

*Cantique*, 293

**22*****Her Innocence***

"You are beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you." [Cant. 4:7] It is this purity, this beauty, this

total receptivity, this halo, this dominion and claim on God, which permitted her to place her hand on His own scepter.<sup>5</sup> It is this grace and this justice which the Virgin descended from heaven to bring to us.

*Apocalypse*, 193

## 23

### *Union with God*

She hears and understands what the Father tells the Son in heaven, and its echo lies in the heart of the Son.

She does not simply understand, she incarnates, she elaborates an image, she is the mother of God.

Through the action of the Holy Spirit, it is she who produces God, who makes Him accessible, who transforms Him and presents Him whole to our flesh and our eyes. It is she who provides us with Christ as a complete man. It is she who embraces the Father in all the force of His generative power so that He begets Christ not just once, but endlessly, in the heart of each Christian.

*Epée*, 195

## 24

### *Union with Christ*

The veil of Veronica that is preserved today at Turin has absorbed for all time the emanation of Christ's humanity, of His face and body. But is not the soul of the Virgin Mary a more appropriate medium than mere scraps of cloth to absorb, reproduce, and fix in changeless currency the mystery of the incarnation? I see the image of the suffering face of God on the day of His Redemption, stamped on her soul as on a piece of money, by means of which we are rendered solvent.

*Epée*, 194

<sup>5</sup> A reference to Esther, to whom Assuerus offered his scepter. (Cf. Esther 15:14)

**25**

It is Mary who, in the name of Humanity, fully answers God's call, that "Where are you?" which reverberated through the Garden of Eden after the fall of man. "Where are you?" asks the grief-stricken Father. As for the blind creature who is victim of that pride to which he yielded with passionate reluctance—he, poor creature, cannot check the desperate query that comes to his lips: "You, Father, where are you?"

If someone will only show us the Father, it will be enough!

And lo, a great cry rings out; it is the voice of a woman, a virgin: "I found him whom my heart loves . . . and I would not let him go." [Cant. 3:4] I have found Him so utterly that never again will He succeed in ridding Himself of me. I hold Him, I withhold Him, I contain Him—how shall I say it?—it is He who contains me. I am that stem from whom, before the eyes of nations, He borrows root, stature, life, personality, and speech!

*J'aime*, 101

**26***Mary Bequeathed to Mankind*

When on Calvary Jesus makes His last will and testament in favor of mankind and when to His mother He leaves a son, and to the son He leaves His mother, His own, it is not simply an affectionate formality. It is a solemn and sacramental transaction. He leaves this son with all his needs, which will allow no rest for her maternal instincts, and He leaves this mother, His own, with all her prerogatives.

One is to preserve, the other to serve.

*J'aime*, 106

**27****Motherhood**

As all fatherhood is in God, so all motherhood is in Mary. At least she is the chosen depository of that motherhood which is in God, according to the words placed in His mouth by the prophet Isaia: "That even should your mother forget you, I will never forget you." [49:15]

Mary became mother of Jesus Christ, which means that through her all women, honored by her and inseparably one with her, have become in a certain sense the mothers of Jesus Christ. Daughter of Eve, He who is born of you, a woman like any other, "shall be called the Son of God." [Luke 1:35] For our sake a God emerges from the deepest bowels of Humanity.

*J'aime*, 107

**28**

Our heavenly Father who by the Word is Author of all that is, has chosen to share His creative power with a woman. She has the Word, she carried this Beauty, this Love, and now holds It proudly aloft before the eyes of Him who since time began has been the mighty instigator of life and growth. By the birth of this Son, she becomes Mother of all that time has brought forth from its very conception.

*Rose*, 120

**29**

Since God made use of her to obtain the Man-God who is Christ, is it not natural that He turn to her to obtain this regenerated son who is the Christian? . . . She understands God's request, His peculiar need for this new soul. She is the intimate and all-embracing Church which knows it cannot dispense with this new member . . . Slow, yielding, patient,

persistent, wise, tender, she makes a cast of this new saint (for every man ready to be born is a potential saint). . . . This is what I understand by the nursing or motherly role of Mary.

*Rose*, 126–127

## 30

### *Dialogue Between Mary and the Soul of Man*

Mirror of peace, torch of the spirit, overflowing vessel of the soul! Harvest of meditation, doorway to our lips, moon, nectar drawn from a source invisible to our eyes! We look up at you as you sit in contemplation. Bestower of alms! The sun solemnly shows us where we are, but the moon rouses in us the sense of where we are not.

“Fellow spirit!” she says, “shrouded eye, friend, emanation from your center of that name spelled by love, ah, if there is in you some secret spring of gentleness and fragrance, do not refuse this beam which I have borrowed for your sake, a distillation of reverence and of dew! It is the darkness that allows me to reach you, it is the silence that permits you to hear me. Bathed in the one I love, I invite you to share my beatitude.”

*Cantique*, 288

## 31

### *Role as Mother of Mankind*

Just as deep in her womb she fashioned Christ, so she fashions the Christian in the image of her Beloved until it is time for him to emerge. This is why the sacred text specifically represents her as presiding over doorways: “By the gates of the City,” says the Book of Proverbs, “in the entryways.” [8:3] “Happy the man watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts.” [8:34] These are the Two Commandments.

*Poète*, 96

## 32

### *Mary's Role at Our Death*

As she held the living Christ in her arms, Mary now embraces the dead Christ.<sup>6</sup> And as every man born of woman lived in Him and lay on her breast, so every man who dies, dies only in her embrace and receives as his first burial place the very mother who made him in the image of her Son.

In the cradle or on the deathbed, when man is no longer able to stand on his own feet, his mother appears to comfort him. It is she who tucks us in and prepares us for that deep sleep from which the Angel's trumpet will awaken us at last.

*Epée*, 156

## 33

### *Presence and Role*

Hail to Thee, Our Father who art in heaven, and good morning to you, Celestial Mother, clothed with the sun!

It is you who, according to the rhythm of the months, which are also years and centuries, remain at the center of the zodiac under that sign which bears your name, whose diadem is crowned in turn by Sagittarius, the Ram, and the Lion; it is you whose countenance dispels the shadows of darkness and death, it is you whose breath warms this living earth of ours, rousing all things and bringing them to their fullness. It is you who every morning greet the curved path of the planet as it swims into your sight, spilling toward you a cataract of mountains, seas, and deserts, great blue and yellow patches between the twin stigmata of its poles. It is you who come streaming through the windowpanes of hospitals and factories —and of cathedrals, when the priest lifts the host and the chalice in his hands.

\* At the descent from the cross.

It is you who shower the blank page of the writer with ideas, and the woodland paths beneath our feet with countless gold. It is you who bend over the cradles of sleeping children and who gently unlock the hearts of the innocent.

And it is you, too, who train the old man's feet for those first timid steps beyond the flesh which he is about to take. There they are, carefully ranged in the churchyards, those numberless generations who have pronounced you blessed.

*Rose, 65*

### 34

From the first moment when she felt that hungry mouth gnaw her breast and imbibe her heart, Mary has been the prey and the accomplice of that great theological desire of the All-Powerful. She participates in the vigor and indignation of this God who cries out from His bowels, What! I who cause others to give birth, shall I not give birth myself? She gives herself to be consumed, to be plowed to the roots.

Yes, I understand that great longing that compels You to turn to me, to release from that prison, which I am for you, those two arms that will find their full spread only on the cross. Take my son, then—O my God—take all of me! Take my blood, take my heart, take my soul, take them all! And do not think that You will even succeed in leaving me; do not think that wherever You are and wherever You go, Your mother will ever cease to be with You! or that, whatever You do, she will not do it with You!

*Rose, 168*

### 35

"She picks out a field to purchase; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard." [Prov. 31:16] This field which she picks out is the Church, and it is also the soul of man for which

she has provided the ransom and of which it is said that it was redeemed at great cost. The vine, which she planted with this fruit which we see in her arms, is the cross.<sup>7</sup>

*Poète*, 93

### 36

That resplendent sister who was equal to bearing a God . . . Mary who assails us with her Christ-bearing virtue.

*Rose*, 221

### 37

#### *Her Prerogative*

There are things that Christ Himself does not understand unless His Mother whispers them in His ear.

*Rose*, 76

### 38

O Mary, you are our living tongue, you are our eloquence without end. You alone can talk face to face with God! Only you can divine our thoughts, express our souls, pray our prayers, desire our desires, cry our cries, suffer our pain . . . For that Word which begets all things is ever with you in order that you may express all things, in order that you may whisper in the Father's ear the names of all who are capable of being His sons. And if He pretends not to see, your skill insures that His groping fingers will find His Lamb!

*Rose*, 92

### 39

#### *Mary and the Church*

I am the heart of the Church! It is I who, indissolubly wed to God by love, must lead Him deep down into the old

\* *A propos* of the verse, "When one finds a worthy wife." [Prov. 31:10]

wine cellar of the corporeal mansion, that He may revive the whole body to its extremities, and not suffer it to die.

*Cantique, 27*

## 40

### *Our Lady of Lourdes*

This is the sublime countenance which the Eternal kept in sight as an inspiration from which to create the world! Small wonder, then, that at the sight of her, sores are healed and cripples, whose whole architecture is out of joint, are made straight. Blocked passages reopen, torn tissues are rebuilt, and constricted hearts expand. Body and soul are drawn to the emulation of that image of God, resplendent, humble, victorious, grateful, faithful, prayerful . . . She hands us her rosary as an invitation to ascend. Yes, Mother of God, image of God, it is with you, in Joy without end, that we would rise from rose to rose!<sup>8</sup>

*Seigneur, 81*

## 41

Prolific virgin, says the prophet, abound and fill me with admiration of those teeming multitudes to whom you gave birth on a single day. Behold, they come to you from north and south, and there is not one of these radiant citizens of eternity who does not recognize you as his mother.

*J'aime, 98*

## 42

### *Mary and the Bible*

It has been said of many of the saints and monks, St. Bernard in particular, that they knew all of Scripture literally

<sup>8</sup> A rose, in French, can also be a species of precious stone, thus completing the image of the rosary as a pathway of gems leading the way to heaven.—*Trans.*

by heart, and that, like the thousand shields that embellished the walls of King David's mystic arsenal and vibrated at the sound of his harp, the sacred verses crowded to their lips to answer all the needs of their minds and hearts, and to solve all the problems of their daily lives.

What, then, of the Blessed Virgin, who does not need to learn the Bible since she herself is a living Bible? She is the support of the Word, the stem of that sun which illuminates the world with the radiance of words that do not pass away. She stands singing the *Magnificat* and telling God of the wondrous work He chose her to perform. She is the voice of the whole universe which encircles her like a crown and which she eases of that great burden of glorification and thanksgiving with which it swells.

*J'aime*, 117

## 43

It is she; it is she! At the thought of her the whole Bible catches fire in my mind in a blaze of syllables, like a fabric sown with brilliants!

It is she; it is she! She is the drop of manna the Lord placed in the mouth of Eve to take away the taste of the forbidden fruit and to impart it to Adam. It is she who set all sacred history in motion.

It is she who lured Abraham from the town of Ur of the Chaldees, away from those hydraulic complications and regulations and all that bakery of clay idols, and who summoned him out into the world to take command and leadership of his flock. It is she who led him to those plateaus where we meet Melchisedech, King of Salem, and who raised that pavilion where the guests are the Three Persons of the Trinity.

She is the image of Isaac in the heart of Rebecca, she is the treaty of Jacob through all those years of slavery. She was waiting, drum in hands, on the opposite bank of the Red Sea to greet the terrified column of refugees. She beguiled David

through the eyes of Bathsheba—and through the mouth of Solomon she gave caravans to the Queen of Sheba in exchange for the incense of the desert and the ivory of Ethiopia, a wondrous remuneration of riddles and enigmas.

Down through the generations of Kings and Pontiffs, mortified believers and wailing women, through the transplantations of Babylon and Medea, she fed silently on the milk and honey of the prophecies. She whom “all generations have called blessed” is the central figure and the culmination of a whole race tormented by the word of God.

*Rose, 121*

## 44

### *Devotion to Mary (The Rosary)*

We know from the example of Bernadette that these worthless stones, which we can hardly spit out of our mouths, become, when transformed by the fingers of the Virgin, sips of an ecstatic dew!

*Seigneur, 89*

## 45

What are these roses which never cease to appear, bloom, shed their petals, and bloom again around those bare feet which bruised the serpent? Are they not the very elements of the Rosary, those humble prayers of ours which rise no higher than the feet of the Immaculate Virgin but which, thanks to that chain she lets down to us, are raised to her heart and to her lips? And if, at the invitation of that cross which hangs suspended from a crown, we dare raise our eyes toward that Lady whose girdle is all Heaven, do we not see each bead of our rosaries mount the ladder and scaffolding of these ten fingers, each crowding its neighbor and bringing it to its knees, each reaching at last those lips that once received the kiss of the Holy Spirit? The blessed mouth awaits our

humble words, and the upturned eyes bear them at last into  
the bosom of the Trinity!

*Seigneur*, 91

## 46

A child of Eve like us, granted—but I am not one of those who, through literary or personal prejudice, exaggerate her rustic side: goodwife, poor woman, simple housekeeper. No, no! Sovereign of Angels, Queen of Philosophers, Mother of God, maintain your august rank, do not put off that splendid garment in which you are clothed! This is the way we love you! *In fimbriis aureis*: that golden fringe is but the outward show of that glory gleaming from within.

*Seigneur*, 83

# Suffered Under Pontius Pilate, Was Crucified, Died, and Was Buried

*Je crois sans y changer un seul point ce que mes pères ont cru avant moi,  
Confessant le Sauveur des hommes et Jésus qui est mort sur la croix.  
Odes, 203*

IT WAS not with a cold or unfeeling eye that the poet regarded the cross!<sup>1</sup> The Passion of his Master pierced his heart like a sword. There is not one of his poems or commentaries which does not bear its image in miniature. Claudel is the disciple of the

<sup>1</sup> A reference to Claudel's *Un Poète regarde la Croix*.

Christ who was crucified on Calvary. He could not forget Him if he tried, and his finest lyric flights and his most profound meditations, those richest in doctrine, are devoted to the Mystery of the Redemption.

He takes us to Gethsemane where the Son of Man is seized by rude hands: "these are no longer

the delicate fingers of the Blessed Virgin, nor the eager but fearful adoration of that other Mary," these hands are "skilled and full of hate, the hands of a butcher." (*Poète*, 60)

Then the agony begins: "this naked and shivering body is all wrapped in stripes, all clothed in wounds," while expert hands weave the crown of thorns, "that ring of fire and needles." (*Poète*, 48)

Behold the Redeemer on the Way of affliction, "this nameless creature, His harness strapped on His back, staggering under the monstrous framework" of the Cross like "Atlas shouldering the Universe." (*Epée*, 49)

And when His executioners have fastened Him to the instrument of His torment, He appears not as one who is vanquished but as "a God fully in action, utterly absorbed in the effort to raise the whole world to His level . . . The cross is God at work." (*Ibid.*, 240, 244)

Claudel's Christianity is not a defeatist resignation, it is a dynamic union with a victorious Messiah. His whole faith is illumined by the triumph of Christ. With the utmost delicacy he perceives the Creator "in the attitude of a suppliant," bathing our feet "with His kisses and His tears," and who knows? he adds poignantly, "perhaps He is still there. We must take care not to step on Him." (*Ibid.*, 240)

This cross where God hangs dying is also the wine press where the heavenly fruit is to be pressed: "You can hear the bones cracking under the screw, between the two plates of this machine cranked at the base." (*Seigneur*, 107)

It is not only on these two intersecting beams that the Redeemer, "spread out to the utmost," extends His arms, it is "on the Universe whose knot, center, reason for being, heart, and hinge He now and forever forms. . . . It is the whole world which He draws to Himself with each inhalation, tearing it out by the roots with the beams from His hands and feet" and which He restores to His Father "in that exhalation which is a Word." And Claudel concludes with this powerful sentence: "The Cross is that Deed in the heart of the world by which all is fulfilled in the Word." (*Poète*, 149)

Let us note, that all the poet's compassion for the suffering Christ, which inspired his most beautiful writing, never deteriorates into insipidity or bathos. The sublime struggle of the Son of God with the powers of darkness must not be an occasion for sentimentalized pity. This is made clear in the description of the Virgin at the foot of the Cross: she is not swooning in the arms of St. John; she is on her feet, vigorously participating in the great work of the Redemption. With what forceful, telling strokes Claudel depicts

this Mother, not overcome by sorrow, but a "valiant woman" *par excellence*, "fully awake and aware . . . the image of the Church," conscious of her unique role. "She sees, she knows, she watches, she witnesses!" (*Epée*, 72)

It is in such passages that Claudel's virile faith asserts itself, devoid not of sentiment, but of sentimentality. It is a powerful and lucid faith, humble and repentant, stretched taut in the effort to concentrate on "this beating Heart to which it is drawn." (*Poète*, 244)

Wherever he turns, his sharp-eyed faith points out to him the

blessed traces of the Redemption of the Son of God: "There is not a pebble on the road, not a thorn in the hedge, on which He has not left a drop of His blood or a shred of His flesh." (*Epée*, 48)

Although the emotion is strong and the language occasionally of a piercing realism, Claudel never indulges in exaggeration or excess; he abandons at the outset any mere oratorical effects. He does not address himself to a surface sensibility but to that secret spring of the human will which must respond with nobility and magnanimity.

## 1

### *Job as the Suffering Christ*

The Book of Job belongs to the most ancient bedrock of the literature of the Bible. And at the other end of this long road of Scripture, which extends through the ages, there appears another Job, but how much more sorrowful, how much more the perfect summation of all that the human condition can present not only of physical or spiritual suffering, but of injustice—and not of an arbitrary injustice, but an essential one. We are at Gethsemane; the case is no longer of a rich landowner who loses his fortune, or a father bereft of his children, or a man at the mercy of a blind enemy who does not know what he is doing. This time it is God who has become man, who has taken upon Himself all the horror of our humanity.

Look now, old Job! You call Him to justice; behold

how He has answered your summons. You asked Him to appear in court on equal terms; He has done so. What do you have to say now? Is He sufficiently stripped of His divinity? You could search in vain for anything more naked or defenseless.

Job had friends who clumsily but sincerely took an interest in his predicament. Christ too has friends, friends whom for three years He has nurtured with the deepest secrets of His heart and mind—His very flesh and blood. There they are, snoring on the ground, and when they rouse themselves from their dull stupor, they will take to their heels as fast as they can. Peter denies Him, Judas has betrayed Him for silver. In the name of the very Law which He Himself gave to the world He is solemnly accused, tried, condemned, excommunicated, and put to death.

*J'aime*, 16

## 2

### *The Treachery of Judas*

The moment of expulsion is at hand. This Christ who last Sunday entered Jerusalem in triumph on a path strewn with the spoils of nature and the harvest of humanity, this irresistible Christ before whom the gates of the city fell spontaneously from their hinges, this Christ who in the sight of His people and on the rock of David proclaimed Himself in words confirmed by thunder—this Christ, Judas solemnly declares is no longer wanted. The time has come to eliminate Him. The time has come to expel once and for all that benediction which, down through the ages, has tormented the bowels of Israel. He is not only condemned, but accursed. Away with Him!

The tradition of Christianity begins with the extradition of Jesus Christ.

*Poète*, 51

## 3

*Jesus Stripped of His Clothing*

"What our hands have handled of the Word of life," says St. John. No longer the delicate fingers of the Blessed Virgin lifting the veil from the newborn child, nor the eager but fearful adoration of that other Mary clinging to the feet of her Saviour, not even the meaningless aggression of those brute furies to whom He was first delivered: this is the hour of the technician, the executioner who knows his job. It is to the whole body of Christ in its mass, volume, and division into limbs that these coarse hands, skilled and full of hate, now turn in a gesture that belongs at once to the butcher and the chiropractor.

Let us strip Him before we are forced to hold Him down and feel the body scream at the pull of the jack. Let us begin by seizing that coat of many colors in which Joseph's mother dressed her son, the dreamer of dreams, that whole prophetic tissue of forms and colors in which the Divine Wisdom wrapped the Messiah; let us tear it off Him with a loud guffaw, and it's just too bad if the skin comes too!

*Poète, 60*

## 4

*The Flagellation*

Behold first the flagellation from head to foot carefully administered by experts. Now comes the malicious and lingering crown of thorns made of three brambles artfully intertwined. And then, forward! *Vexilla Regis prodeunt*. Behold the victor beneath His cross; now begins that sacred procession under which the foundations of the earth have never ceased to tremble. Here is Calvary, where the Mother has followed her Son, and where, I think, she perhaps preceded

Him. Behold the Word incarnate, stripped of all Its outer coverings, without a rag to hide It from our eyes.

*Discours*, 31

## 5

This body . . . all wrapped in stripes, all clothed in wounds, so that not an inch of this sacred flesh has escaped the cruel inquisition of Justice, these lashes armed with plumbs and hooks which have descended on it. . . . These are not passages which we must decipher line by line, this is the whole Passion presented to our eyes in a single image.

*Toi*, 14

## 6

Blind rage is succeeded by clear-eyed hate. Now His dimmed countenance is no longer enough, we must have the whole body of Christ stripped from head to foot of all veils and accessories. He is the one we are after! It is time we took measure of this body all naked and shivering before us. . . .

Hurled at random, the whip cleaves to the victim, it hisses, it clings, it writes on Him, it pierces the surface, it penetrates the inmost recesses like a flame, it leaves a sharp and deadly record of us on His whole length. It lashes, it cuts, it severs, and that heavy barb at its end tears out and brings back bits of living flesh. . . . Strike, strike, torturer, as hard as you can, wherever you can! With every scrap of flesh you tear a soul from Him!

*Poète*, 46

## 7

### *The Spitting*

The first humiliation for Christ is the spitting. It is the first blind and almost instinctive reaction of the animal faced

with the danger of divinity. Our whole being shrinks back in horror, and we try to fling it from us. I mean both the verbal spitting of insult and blasphemy, and the actual ejection of spittal. We try to give Him physical contact with our denial.

The moisture that fills our mouths and serves the faculties of digestion and of speech we fling in His face; we spit Him our salutation. Speech has become excrement. With His saliva, with His word mingled with earth, the Lord once made an ointment to heal our blindness: let us repay Him with this gob of slime!

*Poète, 44*

## 8

### *The Buffeting*

These are the animal instincts, the brute passions, the wild agitation of an intoxicated mob which hurls itself on Christ and tries to crush Him under its weight, to bruise Him, to grind Him, to disfigure Him. . . . Listen to the slapping of these hands raised at random against the sacred flesh! Our right hand, the image of the one that created the world!

*Poète, 44*

## 9

### *The Crown of Thorns*

But what are they doing, those amateurs over there? Really, they are true artists who are fashioning with taste a little masterpiece of weaving skill. To take these three carefully chosen lengths of bramble, to bend them, to intertwine them, to fasten them firmly together in the perfect shape of a crown, to arrange these cruel thorns without hurting themselves, so that the lucky recipient derives the full benefit, is a delicate operation which is entrusted to cleverer hands than

those of gross soldiers. This King who has been delivered to us, must He not have a crown? A real crown, something strongly woven, durable, something secure, stitched to the very flesh, planted in the temples and the bones of the skull?

It is the ram caught in the brambles which Providence offers to Abraham to take the place of his own son on the altar. No longer the shower of repeated blows, the ruinous power of the lash; now He is surrounded by a hostile and unyielding circle. Here is doubt, more painful, more poisonous than denial. The band, the serpent encircling His head, is there to stay; it is a circle of fire and needles.

*Poète, 47*

## 10

"Art thou, then, a King?" Pilate asks; and this Man with His hands tied answers, "Thou sayest it."

Come forth, daughters of Jerusalem, and look upon Him in the crown with which His mother has crowned Him on the day of his marriage! [cf. Canticle 3:11] How many mysteries are contained in this one simple phrase! The crown is the crown of thorns, and who has placed it on His head? Not His enemies, but His Mother! This is the means she has found to make a king of Him. And why a king? Because nothing less would honor the bride whom she has chosen for Him—the bride who is none other than the human soul. And this nuptial crown is not a mere decoration, a dead object; it is alive. It is the grafting, the stitching, the driving into the head, it is the piercing and greedy embrace of the thorn of humanity, it is the insatiable measuring of desire and doubt endlessly intertwined . . .

Behold it is here, the grievous day of His wedding on earth, prelude to the one which will be consummated in Heaven!

*Cantique, 112*

**11**

Like Moses, we have been allowed to look directly on the burning bush. It is not for nothing that the world has reclaimed the royalty which the vine and the palm concealed. It is not for nothing that in a tangled thicket was found this ram to take Isaac's place under the sacrificial knife—this ram whose horns wind around his ears in matching spirals.

*Rose*, 182

**12**

Here, at last, is the cross, the supreme instrument of interrogation in the legal sense of the word, the windlass rigged to sail to the limit of hypostasis, the admirably designed stretching machine which measures with its four arms just how far the flesh of this victim entrusted to it cleaves to divinity.

*Discours*, 32

**13**

Behold the Victor who steps forth to do battle; see Him standing erect on the threshold, the redresser of the universe, the restorer of justice. . . . Here I am! Who could go forth in My place, when it is the very axis of the world that needs righting?

*Rose*, 169

**14**

Through Him, the wilderness takes on form. It is He who justifies History, releases time, and sets the distant hills in motion.

*Rose*, 188

## 15

### *The Way of the Cross*

Like the rising sun, like Atlas shouldering the Universe . . . this torn and tottering mass, this nameless creature, His harness strapped on His back, staggering under the monstrous framework, this living tower under its own scaffolding, this Samson come to the edge of Gaza, this anathema come to the edge of the rampart and who appears, murdered and victorious, above that abyss which is the downfall of all—it is You, my Son! Murdered and victorious, mauled and massacred, torn and lacerated from head to foot, pouring forth blood, light, and divinity from every pore—it is You, my Son!

It is You, my God, my Creator and Redeemer, the scapegoat which for centuries Jerusalem has been laboring to uproot and expel from her bowels! At last she has succeeded in driving it out in a storm of blows and curses! She has gotten rid of Him. Like Judas she has voided herself with a single effort, and she delivers Him to the world with a final scream of childbirth.

Now it is as if the dike of a dam has burst and the unleashed flood sweeps everything along with it: present, past, and future, the people and prophecies of the Old Testament, pell-mell, the seeds of posterity and the scattered members of the future Church, the uprooted obstacle caught in the whirlpool, the vomitings of hate and despair, the invasion of that vast sunken land around us that demands to be filled.

Jesus Christ advances, formidable, amid this tidal wave, and the Virgin follows Him with dry feet. He has brought with Him a torrent and it rests with Him whether we may moisten our lips or not.

**16***The Elevation of the Cross (After the Painting by Rubens)*

This powerful diagonal, this great bird which rises and takes its flight, this Man being hoisted up to meet His Father, this hand triumphantly raised which calls Heaven to witness, all this toiling and grinding of teeth which is resolved by that enthronement at the right hand of the Father; all this vibrating between hope and terror forces the beholder off balance. . . . It is one of those moments when devotion bows to drama.

*Poète*, 202

**17***On the Cross*

Behold the great Word open before our eyes, spread out before us, for us to read at sight. He is fixed forever before us in that primitive position in which He made heaven and earth. All the heretics may attack His limbs, they may succeed in dislocating His femur but they will not succeed in disturbing the hypostatic union, that vital articulation, that other femur on which the Apocalypse tells us are inscribed the words “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” [19:16]

Here is the invitation directed to us by those two arms which made the world and which will remain there all day until they have remade it. Behold those great wings unfurled through which two things become one. Behold God, behold Love shamelessly exposed and unveiled before our eyes. Behold Jesus crucified on a triangle and the completion in His own person of the man envisioned by Zacharias who “stretches forth the measuring line over Jerusalem.” [Zach. 1:16]

*Poète*, 61

## 18

“And if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself.” [John 12:32] I am instantly reminded of that elevation which is the central moment of the Mass, when the priest, modern counterpart of the ancient sacrificer, displays to heaven and earth this victim, this throbbing heart, that lives in his hands. As this standard is raised, the tide of the faithful rises from the back of the Church to break on the steps of the sanctuary. And I associate their supplication with that strange episode of the brazen serpent [Numbers 21], that deadly and devouring principle which Moses plucks from the sand and hoists on the end of a pike, to become the means of curing his maddened people. That which, when hidden on the ground, bit and killed, now visible, held aloft, becomes our deliverance. The minister of death has become an instrument of salvation.

*Poète*, 238

## 19

Jesus Christ tells us that the measure of His exaltation is that of His abasement. There is nothing so low that He has not chosen to befriend it. Not only does He crawl in the mud like the serpent or in corruption like the worm; He is under our feet. It is our very foundations, the basis of our movement and our equilibrium alike, that He has come to verify, sanctify, and baptize. It is at our feet that the Creator has assumed the attitude of a suppliant; our feet that He has watered with His kisses and His tears. (And who knows? He may be there still. We must take care not to step on Him.)

*Poète*, 239

**20**

The God we worship is not simply upright, He is exalted. He is unfurled to the utmost, there is not a fiber of His body where power is not in action! He is above everything, He holds onto nothing, but it is He who holds us and we who hold fast to Him, indissolubly. He is suspended there for all time as an intermediary between heaven and earth. He is a God in full operation. Not only is He Himself raised, but with His eyes fixed on His Father, He is utterly absorbed in the effort to raise all else, even ourselves, to His own level.

*Poète*, 240

**21***The Cross*

Of this inexhaustible energy of Christ which draws everything to Him, of this fourfold longing exerted at once on the left and on the right, on the heights and on the depths, of this all-embracing Unity, of this cosmic transaction, the Cross is not merely the abstract symbol but, I venture to suggest, the concrete mechanism. The crucified Christ never ceases to function. It is a visible machine in constant use. It is the unfailing leaven which never ceases to operate on the three measures of meal.

*Poète*, 243

**22**

The Cross is God at work. It is not only His rack, it is His active self, His extracting and unifying role, His extension between the four cardinal points: the North, or Zenith, which is its heavenly origin; the South, or Nadir, which is matter warmed by grace, on which force must be exercised; and

those arms to right and left which are the implements of its earthly power.

*Poète, 244*

## 23

Since God was crucified in the center of the world, its sole concern has been to pay closer and closer attention to this beating heart to which it is drawn.

*Poète, 244*

## 24

"I am not come to be served, but to serve." [Matt. 20:28]

Well, if it is true that You came to serve, I dare say You got what you were after! I do not speak for myself alone, but for the whole lot of us, people just like me. It is painful to know that You are here at our disposal and that we can think of no better use for You than to help pass that tedious half-hour before dinner on Sunday. I may be right in thinking that You prefer downright sinning to such chill good manners. All the same, those two who kept You company on the Cross were not very desirable types. And, incidentally, where are You coming from now? . . . "Here is the smell of crowded fields," someone said. You smell of fields, You smell of hovels and evil holes, of universities and hospitals, of cemeteries and theaters, of battlefields and factories, of all the slaughter-houses where the bodies and souls of men, women, and children perish.

"The good smell of Christ," Your protégé, St. Paul, used to call it. We cannot get rid of You so easily, and the bond that attaches You to the cross, that marriage You celebrated with her, is still in force. As the peasant smells of the land and the shoemaker of leather, as the baker smells of bread, and the painter of paint, and the fanatic scholar—just try to have a

chat with him!—reeks from every pore of that laboratory where he buries himself twenty-six hours a day, so the Christ I press to my heart is not the ruddy athlete of Delacroix.<sup>2</sup> This Christ is the miserable rag of humanity, buffeted, bled, crushed, drained, rent, twisted, stretched, wounded, pierced, broken, probed, harassed, clawed, torn, mauled, and assailed from head to foot not only by hate and all the powers of hell, but by faith, pure faith I tell you, and also by that terrible faith without faith, by the faith and love and despair of all Mankind. So do we drive out any trace of Almighty God from this flesh which belongs to us and which He has no right to, which is ours because He gave it to us! There is no doubt about it: it is all man and all God who is tonight my wretched and triumphant victim! This is not my own idea, it is Scripture.

*Seigneur*, 103–105

## 25

Of the two pieces of the cross, one is designed for elevation, the other for extension. One fixes the cross in the earth and connects it to heaven; the other, going from right and left, spreads it abroad as far as the eye can see, thus establishing the scales of that Money-changer on which all values are weighed.

*Cantique*, 106

## 26

There is not a pebble on the road, not a thorn on the hedge, on which He has not left a drop of His blood or a shred of His flesh.

*Epée*, 48

<sup>2</sup> See the painting depicting Jacob wrestling with the angel, in the Church of Saint Sulpice.

## 27

Jesus is planted for all time on Calvary with His back turned to Jerusalem and the Jews. He no longer recognizes them. It is over; they will not see His face again. His mouth will no longer be turned toward them, they will have nothing more from Him but this human silhouette in the void with which He erases the future. From now on they can only know Him *a posteriori*, backwards. They will remain forever behind Him, in the place occupied by Satan (*Vade post me, Satana*), like a negative and spurious shadow.

The heavy impact of the cross being driven in place resounded like the blow of a battering ram to the very center of the earth, introducing an irreparable gap between the Gate and the Way. Israel has at last succeeded in expelling that promise which has been tormenting her bowels since the time of Abraham. Like Judas, she has emptied herself with a single effort of what was inside, and now she has nothing.<sup>3</sup>

*Poète*, 66

## 28

It is not only on these two pieces of wood that the Redeemer is stretched and crucified, but on the Universe of which He henceforth forms the knot, center, *raison d'être*, heart, and hinge, the vital and essential member, the organ which controls respiration and circulation. It is the whole world that He draws to Himself with each inhalation, tearing it out by the roots with the beams from His hands and feet and restoring it to His Father in that exhalation which is a

\* Whatever the difficulties of the free interpretation adopted by the poet here (and earlier in this chapter, Section 15), it should be pointed out that in the original source, it is immediately followed by a moving and noble meditation on the first word of Our Lord on the Cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."—*Editor's note*.

Word. The Cross is that deed in the heart of the world by which all is fulfilled in the Word.

*Poète*, 149

## 29

### *Christ's Solitude*

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" God the heavenly Father, who raised His voice like a thunder roll at the moment of Christ's baptism and of His clash with the Pharisees, is silent. One would say that He is deliberately hiding. He withdraws, He does not want to see, He covers His eyes. It is the moment of the supreme manifestation, that of Absence. Long ago Adam hid himself from God among the trees of Paradise; now it is God's turn to hide. And Christ, in the throes of this terrible metaphysical detachment mingled with the onset of the death agony, hears at His feet this inflated persiflage, this explosion of mirth, this pseudoscientific self-congratulation which for centuries has fed the egos of all so-called intellectuals.

There he is, the one who had faith in God! Yes, gentlemen, let's take a good look; let's feast our eyes on him. . . . You've had it, my friend! You got what was coming to you, but good! It looks as if you like it up there; well, we try to oblige. Try to come down, if you can. This God you were always spouting off about, isn't it about time he showed up? It seems to me we've given him a good opportunity. Come down from your cross, tell him to help you. . . .

*Poète*, 134

## 30

### *His Thirst*

"I thirst!" God is thirsty! In the heart of this world which He made—this creation which owes its entire existence

to Him, whose beginning and end He is—He looks around and concludes, not by means of an abstract philosophical process but in the painful grip of the most immediate and urgent necessity, that there is nothing for Him. He created the world, and the world denies Him a sip of water. A drop of water: the only thing in the world that costs nothing, a thing one would not refuse to a wounded animal, a sick dog, Humanity is refusing to its Maker and Saviour.

*Poète*, 118

## 31

### *The Presence of Mary*

At the moment when He announces His thirst, and the tormenter raises to His lips that rag streaming with an unholy wine, there stands at His feet that Vessel of Devotion which is raised like a chalice to receive the twin jets of blood and water about to stream from the wounded side of the crucified Christ. This overflowing will fill that cup to which all priests until the end of the world will ever raise a penitent and intoxicated lip!

*Epée*, 76

## 32

### *The Good Thief*

“Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom!” The man on the left manfully persists in that vigorous attitude which earns him the sympathy of the “strong-minded.” It hardly matters, because the other man, this courtier of death and destruction, this shameless profiteer, like an empty vessel which suddenly overflows, feels himself flooded by the prodigious promise: “This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.”

Today! With a single phrase he is not only absolved, he is sanctified! In one instant, grace has touched this repulsive exterior, and has made good all the deficiencies of virtue. On this sordid fork it is no longer a criminal brought to justice that we see, it is a martyr, a sacrificial offering that shines forth. The murderer, the fornicator, the thief, the convict, the professional bandit, has become a saint. . . . This fundamental acceptance was enough. It was enough, this imperceptible shift, this tiny chink in the water-tight reservoir of our egoism. One look from beneath those bloodied eyelids was enough to release this cataclysm of repentance, this resurrection mingled with the death agony, this irresistible explosion of Eternity.

*Poète*, 114

### 33

#### *The Game of Dice*

Let us now consider Christ “on the block,” raised up above the whole world. At His feet, squatting around a disordered pile of garments, is a group of gnomes playing cards, and mingled with all the other sounds of the Passion can be heard the rattle of the dice in the cup. For it is not enough that Christ be “liquidated”; He must be parceled out. The sun, dying in the sky, leaves to blind chance, to the empty weapon in the drunkard’s fist, the task of vomiting Him forth. What we have here is a contest so confused, a game of chance so complex, between Man, Time, Justice, and Providence, that only this travesty of a chalice is fit to pronounce with its repeated hiccups the final and unaccountable figures. The caprice of dice forming at the bottom of the cup, the bets placed since the beginning of the world, come from blind chance and return to it. No longer is the interest only being distributed; the whole principal is up for auction.

*Poète*, 64

## 34

*The Death on the Cross*

He who learned to be born and to suffer by our hand  
must now teach us how to die.

*Poète, 142*

## 35

A god is about to die before our eyes. . . . Let us watch as He trembles, struggles, and becomes distorted before us. Let Magdalen stay at the foot of the cross, burning with sacrificial ardor, let this fragrant volcano send forth great cries of love and despair beneath that shower of blood which rains on her drop by drop. Leave that humble sinner in her ecstasy of grief with all those who sorrow, all the hurt and humiliated, all the disgraced and defeated children who behold their only friend being pierced by this terrible spear. . . .

Look, then, to what You have been reduced, and see to what extremity Your Mercy has been led by Your Justice! The Angels were not able to restrain You, nor Your Father's arms, nor the breast of the Trinity! On the very brink of this act by which all things exist He found no way to defend Himself from the shaft of Love.

. . . "God, O my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" This is not the pain of absence, but of separation. . . . The second Person of the Trinity perceives in all its nakedness the dénouement of the adventure He has undertaken, and He Himself proclaims, publishes, and parades as on a banner its fundamental absurdity. . . .

*Poète, 142-146*

**36**

At the moment when Christ's soul leaves His body with a great cry and the centurion's lance makes a passage for that stream which has its source in His heart, the narrow vessel of the holy Earth bursts, and the spiritual topography of the Universe is changed.

*Epée*, 57

**37**

The earth trembles and gapes, the curtain of the temple is torn from top to bottom, the graves vomit up their dead. There is a universal shuddering of the whole creation around the cross. On all sides things break asunder and yawn open: a fissure is produced in response to the event, a separation is established, and a veil is torn.

*Epée*, 54

**38**

The curtain of the temple is torn, the stunned animals flee in all directions and bump against each other, bellowing. The dead weep. A great cry escapes from the Holy of Holies and fills the whole town, from Antonia to the valley of Hinnon: let us leave this place! And meanwhile the blackened moon, like the pious Veronica with her handkerchief, wipes away the bloody face of the Sun. To the right and left of Christ the good and bad thieves hang, hideous and shattered. Calvary is deserted, and on the winding road, down below, can be seen the tiny figure of a lone man, running away as fast as he can.

*Poète*, 201

**39***The Dead Christ*

Let us take advantage of this moment of Your death and the circumstance that prevents You from being buried—and of the fact that we are alone—to seal tenderly the mouth of that wound, those lips which can no longer remember any other kiss! And then, come with us, silence! Silence is the place where we will lead You, a place more destitute than Bethlehem, more humble than the inn at Emmaus. It is a subterranean spot frequented only by those shades which have fled the black face of the morning sun, a place stripped of all beauty. But a table is there on which, between two candles, the bread and wine have been disposed. Bless them, O Lord, with Your sacred hand, that hand which pretended to be dead and which lives, so that once more we may take with You the Passover!

*Epée, 98***40***The Pierced Side*

Now let it flow, we are thirsty! Let that virtue which is within Him pour forth, let that source in Him be released, whether by draining the blood from the hands and feet, or by opening ourselves a passage directly to the heart. . . . It was not idly that He spoke of that living water “springing up unto life everlasting.” [John 4:14] There is, gushing forth in great sobs, through the deep gashes in that still burning heart.

*Poète, 61***41**

We have obeyed the teaching of the Gospel: “Knock and it shall be opened unto you.” We have not merely glanced

through this text offered for our study but, as was recommended, we have probed right to its root and source, passing from the outer to the inner. Beginning with the visible, we have tapped the very soul.

*Poète*, 62

## 42

The lance in the hand of Longinus went beyond Christ's heart; it opened God, it pierced the very bosom of the Trinity. This is "the Lamb who has been slain from the foundation of the world." [Apoc. 13:8] That foundation in the Word is one with eternity. "Knock, and it shall be opened to you," Christ said. Very well, we have knocked, and it has been opened to us. It was for this that God became flesh, for this that He procured a heart with the help of the Virgin. We have placed a seal on Him, a stigmata. The crucifix has been added to the Trinity—not just a scar, however resplendent, but an open wound. "For we have not a high priest who cannot have compassion," says St. Paul. [Heb. 4:15] Indeed, there is no quality on which Scripture insists more strongly than that of mercy.

*Epée*, 256

## 43

### *The Church and the Cross*

The sacred lance is placed in the hands of the centurion. He thrusts it with all his might into the side and heart of the crucified Christ, and the Gospel tells us that out gushes blood and water. And then, out of the darkness covering heaven and earth, rises that cry, that confession which still echoes down through the ages: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" [Mark 15:39]

At last it is out, at last it has been wrung from us, this full and sufficient response, a response which the Son left His

Father to win from us. And He has obtained it only by means of the cross. Now, Our Lord is with us in His Church until the end of the world, and it is she who is fastened in His place, who is coerced and cross-examined in His stead!

She, too, will answer only with the cross; only by becoming the cross will she "be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth." [Eph. 3:18] She must go forth from her master, unfurling in all directions the wings of that great Eagle which is spoken of in the Apocalypse!

Depth means being firmly rooted in faith, in the doctrine and on the rock which is Peter; width, those right and left arms wide enough to embrace not only this world but the other as well. The moment is come which is spoken of in Ecclesiastes, the moment to embrace. [Eccles. 3:5] And finally, for what purpose are the wings of the great Eagle if not to transport us aloft? Where? St. John tells us: into the wilderness, that wilderness of prayer where we are alone, face to face with the sun, face to face with our Maker. This is what we need above all; we need prayer more urgently than bread.

*Discours, 32*

## 44

### *The Descent from the Cross (After the Painting by Rubens)*

It is no longer to us individually, but to the whole Church, kneeling peacefully, that the Saviour is released to be welcomed with our whole heart, our whole mind, and our full consent. . . .

The key element of the composition is that great sacramental cloth, like the communion cloth, which ties all the figures and various parts of the scene together and which forms around the noble body a sort of luminous halo and a radiant pathway linking heaven and earth. Everywhere, hands stretch out but dare not touch. The arm of the man at the top

is parallel to Christ's and clings to His arm rather than supports it. St. John, with his two arms barely visible under the ritual linen, prepares to lower the body down to the ecstatic heart and soul of the Magdalen waiting below. Another figure is carefully picking up a corner of the cloth so it will not drag on the ground. The only physical contacts in the painting are that arm at the top clinging to the arm of the Father, and that bare foot in the foreground resting tenderly on the bare shoulder of the Magdalen.

Those two men on the crossbar—one young, the other old—who are releasing Christ to us are, I submit, the personification of the two Testaments, the New and the Old. The old man is holding a corner of the drapery between his teeth, so that there seems to issue from his mouth that boundless stream of light, that multiple cataract of prophecies, analogies, and proofs surrounding the figure of the Redeemer, that shroud from which it is being released. The descent of the body is being attended by two venerable figures, one on the right, the other on the left. I imagine these represent the scholars and ecclesiastical authorities whose ranks are suggested by the two ends of that ladder which appear, one above (under the feet of that young man who is almost in flight), the other at the very bottom, resting on the unfastened motto which is propped up by a heavy rock, and on the blood-stained copper basin holding the nails and the crown.

The Pope, prudent and respectful, has his eyes on the ground, but St. Paul receives his impulse and inspiration from heaven. The group in the foreground is composed of four figures: the Blessed Virgin in blue, the two kneeling persons in green, and St. John in red. The first, whose upraised hands follow her eyes in an attitude of supplication, represents Faith; the kneeling couple, Hope; and the eager young man whose right foot both steadies the ladder and prepares to ascend, is Charity.

The body of Christ with the wide span of its arms and

that simple and powerful curve beginning at the toe and terminating in the eloquent hand which bestows its blessing, acts as a liaison between heaven and earth. He gives Himself in all directions; He has nothing left for Himself; and it is on the bare shoulder of the Magdalen that He chooses to descend to earth.

*Poète*, 203–204

## 45

### *Mary at Calvary*

She was upright, and not merely her body; her soul was upright, full of energy, intelligence, power, and love, straight and tall, fully awake and aware. Indeed, was this the moment for the valiant woman, the Mother of God, the image of the Church, to waver or give way? Could she rob Him of a single moment of those three hours she must face her Son, this Son who, firmly fixed to the cross could now no longer escape her? Was this a time to collapse or faint or be preoccupied with her personal sorrow? Is there a single moment to lose in this sacrificial rite in which He has His prearranged role and function?

She has a thousand years to make up for, that mystical thousand years which comprise the reign of the Lamb. When she hears this Son of her flesh and her soul exclaim triumphantly the dread words, “It is consummated!,” she trembles from head to foot but must not weep. Let the earth quake, let the sun hide its face, let the curtain of the temple be torn from top to bottom, but Mary remains on her feet, unshaken. She sees, she understands, she watches, she witnesses, she gives, she receives, she consents.

*Ecce ancilla Domini.* Behold now and forever, once again, the handmaid of the Lord!

*Epée*, 72

## 46

*Jesus Restored to His Mother*

I sit on the throne of the ages, on the promised throne, with the lifeless body on my knees. I share, I embody, this whole responsibility; I contemplate it face to face. "If thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." [Matt. 4:3] But these two have wrought another miracle, and behold, out of this bread they have made a rock.<sup>4</sup>

*Epée*, 245

## 47

*The Entombment*

This gaping mouth of annihilation which once swallowed Jesus' friend<sup>5</sup> and before which the sacred flesh cannot repress a shudder (*infremuit spiritu*) now closes over the Son of Man. Even His Mother may not cross this threshold. When the stone was rolled in front of the opening and "sealed with the ring of the King," can we not imagine that "Mary also trembled in her heart," and that she re-echoed that cry she heard from the cross, "Eloi, Eloi, [the Lord God invoked by His real name] why hast Thou forsaken me?" [Mark 15:34]

*Epée*, 266

## 48

Then Jesus was laid in the tomb. But what of the Gospel, the written Word still present and among us, living, speaking, and guiding: has it not also been laid in the tomb? Well pinned, well tied, well bound, the Bible is now no longer preserved with myrrh and aloes, but with naphtha. Its grave is the dustiest corner of our library; in the place of honor is

<sup>4</sup> The Church (rock) is the body of Christ.

<sup>5</sup> Lazarus.

prominently displayed a magnificent set of the novels of Renan and Anatole France.

You have to look hard to find that old copy of the Bible—it probably belonged to somebody's grandmother. At Mass, most people prefer to look around at their neighbors and yawn. Indeed, the yawn is our standard method of opening ourselves to the Word of God!

*Epée*, 267

## 49

Jesus is laid in the tomb. The tomb is the tabernacle and the Holy Elements. When we receive Him at communion, He is carrying with Him, as it were, this tomb in which He is buried, and we are placed in possession of His absence. "In the midst of you there has stood one whom you do not know." [John 1:26]

*Epée*, 271

## 50

When I see the Christ emerging from that tomb which is His tabernacle to make His way toward that other tomb which is man's heart, toward that row of mouths which open one by one to receive Him, I am reminded of a passage in the Psalms: "Their throat is an open grave" [5:10]—a sepulcher from which one rises again, a grave which is a garden. St. Paul also tells us that baptism is a sort of communion in the tomb: "For you were buried together with Him in Baptism, and in Him also rose again." [Col. 2:12]

*Epée*, 273

## 51

### *God's Ways of Calling Man*

God's attitude toward man is that of a father toward his ungrateful son, a husband toward his cruel and faithless

wife, and—why not?—a passionate inventor toward a reluctant money-lender. The most accurate image we can form of Him is to be found not in Jupiter on Olympus but in Jesus at Gethsemane. The face of Jesus is covered with blood, His mouth is filled with the bitter taste of the Passover which for so long He has wished to share with us.

“Peter, dost thou love me?” From out of the past I hear that same voice with the same intonation. I am speaking stupidly, but let me go on. I hear someone who roars and struggles in the arms of Moses, Someone who cannot sleep in His anxiety, and summons little Samuel. Finally I hear Him, blind and groping at the dawn of the Christian era, claiming that miserable wretch on the road to Damascus. O Saul, it was worth losing my Son to have found you!

*Ev. Isaïe, 29*

## 52

### To Carry Our Cross

O my God, now I understand, it is not a light thing! I do not ask to carry Your cross, but merely to accompany it, to consider it with that unflinching gaze from which neither longing, wonder, nor fear is absent. Look, it has taken flight and beckons to me from above. How can I follow it? I feel that I have undertaken something beyond my strength. These wings of wood, how can I adjust them to fit my shoulders? And here on earth, simply to budge this unfathomable instrument, let alone lift it off the ground—where will I find the strength of sinew, the enormous effort of the will which would be required?

*Poète, 237*

## 53

It is not his outward dress that distinguishes the Christian but an intense and passionate submission to the will of

Jesus Christ and the eager acceptance of the cross He has given us to carry.

*Corr. Suarès, 98*

## 54

"I have come to bring a sword not peace," says the Lord.

I have come to bring the cross, which is the wine press.

I, the Word, have come to interrogate you. All the lives of the saints and histories of the patriarchs ring with the complaints of the clay rebelling against those cruel hands which attempt to refashion it. As St. Thérèse cried rapturously, "Ah, Lord, if this is how You treat Your friends, it is no wonder You have so few of them!" And what does Job say as he scratches his sores with a fragment of that vessel which has just been shattered by the rod of iron? "Perish the day on which I was born, the night when they said, 'The child is a boy.'" [3:3] "I have done nothing!" he shouts in a roar of pain and rage which even today makes our hair stand on end. And from all corners of the earth I hear answering cries and inconsolable sobbing. "What is man that you make much of him, or pay him any heed?" [7:17] And when he reproaches his friend for their advice, the bitterest insult he can fling at them is, "Why do you hound me as though you were divine and insatiably prey upon me?" [19:22]

Centuries pass, and we see the prophet Elias throw himself face down on the ground, crying, "I am no better than my fathers." [II Kings 19:4] And Jonah, to escape his vocation, rushes joyously into the jaws of the whale. As for St. Paul, the Lord explains to the hesitant Ananias what He has in store for this "chosen vessels": "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." [Acts 9:16]

When Paul has reckoned the disasters, the blows, the betrayals, the anxieties, he speaks for all: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" [Heb. 10:31]

*Rose, 32*

# He Descended into Hell

*Je suis mort et je suis ressuscité une fois pour toutes.  
La Messe là-bas*

CHRIST's descent into hell is a difficult subject, and only mature reflection upon the doctrines of theology could guide the poet through this seldom explored territory. Nevertheless, it is surprising how deeply Claudel's religious and poetic intuition has been able to penetrate this inaccessible realm. But perhaps it is not as in-

accessible as it appears to be at first; has not every soul that yields to a grave temptation elected hell as its chosen residence?

Separation from God, estrangement from His friendship, brings "that sulphur that consumes the heart, those hamstrung limbs, that taste of vitriol in the mouth." (*Poète*, 251)

Alas, hell is not so far away that we do not occasionally spend a "season" there. It is so close, in fact, that it is within us. As for Lucifer, that invisible tempter, who incessantly prowls around us "as a roaring lion" [I Peter 5:8], can we not discern his features in the soot-stained light of his crimes? He breathes, he hisses at our backs, Claudel tells us, he delights in vile swamplands. The Gospel pictures him prowling around Jesus, now "like a monkey in the palm trees of Jericho," now "astride the shoulders of Judas." (*Rose*, 78)

The Credo tells us that Christ descended into hell during His stay in the tomb; but what hell, precisely? It would seem that at this point, hell was nothing more than a waiting room of uncertain purpose, which the Saviour was responsible for putting in order.

By His coming He accomplished the segregation of the irrevocably damned, excluded forever from His kingdom, and the righteous which He was to convey with Him to His heavenly Father.

"The gap between Hell and Purgatory, which had until then been contiguous, was widened, and their separation was com-

pleted." Hell which had heretofore been loose and ill-defined took on its definitive form; "it was concentrated and consolidated within itself." (*Epée*, 147)

It was only fitting that Christ, who was to display His omnipotence on earth and in heaven, should also descend into the infernal regions to assert His authority there.

And what a commotion on His arrival! Listen to the noise of gates being torn off their hinges, of those vast mobs of bottled fiends. Now it is no longer Lazarus who rises half-wasted from his grave, it is God Himself. (*Poète*, 231) He rips open Purgatory and releases the millions of souls imprisoned there. (*Rose*, 123)

He is the Good Shepherd come to the rescue of His sheep fallen down the mouth of the cistern. Into this pit of corruption Jesus suddenly brings His exalted presence, His poignant fragrance, His sweet and austere majesty. (*Ibid.*, 231)

"Forward, divine pilgrim. There is many a swamp, many a quagmire yet to be crossed before You . . . place Your hand at last on the shoulder of the ancient Adam." (*Ibid.*, 232)

**1***The Coming of the Lord*

There remains in hell something yet to be brought down by the blow of this mighty ax. Listen to the noise of these gates being torn off their hinges, these sections of wall giving way, steel being dismantled, these huge mobs of bottled fiends, who screech and clamor like a pack of boars, laid open to their very vitals by the crack of the divine lash. Someone approaches in a roll of thunder: He is coming! He is drawing near, He is almost here—someone irresistible, inexorable, who will ride roughshod over all this swarming bestiality! The very roots of things are filled with dread. It is as if someone were shaking the tree of life with his two bare hands. Are all the stars together going to fall on our heads?

*Poète*, 200

**2***The Presence of Christ*

Into this pit of corruption, this larder of corpses, this morgue, this warehouse of coffins, this garden of skulls, this valley of the shadow of death, Jesus Christ suddenly brings His presence, His unequaled power, His poignant fragrance, His sweet and austere majesty, His invincible, inexorable light, at once merciless and desired. Not long ago the door of the grave had been violated for the first time, and at the summons of that terrible voice and that awful right hand there was seen rising from the tomb a Lazarus who was half-consumed. But now it is no longer death who comes to confront God and offer to His eyes this handiwork which is not His, it is God Himself in the person of His second power

who, availing Himself of this opening, descends towards death and sin and comes to cross-examine Chaos.

*Poète*, 231

### 3

It is truly He, it is the sun we had heard about! Forward, divine pilgrim. There is many a swamp, many a quagmire yet to be crossed before You reach Your destination, many a tenacious river where some unnamable and viscous slime darkly flows. Before, at the central knot of our nature, almost embedded in the rock, as deeply rooted as the stump of an oak tree through all the geological ages, You place Your hand at last on the shoulder of the ancient Adam.

*Poète*, 232

### 4

#### *The Emptiness of Absence*

Jesus descended to the foundations of the world not only to strengthen them, to consolidate hell and give it its full meaning, to translate the implicit negation of Satan into an explicit denial, but by the introduction of His countenance to complete the physical sense of the absence of God.

*Poète*, 226

### 5

#### *The Multitude of the Redeemed*

When Jesus walked through the public square of Capernaum or when, emerging from the synagogue, He was greeted by that whole bazaar and clinic of the blind, crippled, epileptic, and leprous which people took pains to shove under His nose, what an uproar carried to the booths and

back rooms of the shops when all this humanity, still a little unsteady, but strengthened and cleansed, began to advance behind Him. But now it is no longer a few dozen unfortunates, a small proportion of the vast swarming misery of an oriental town; now it is all eyes which are opened simultaneously, myriads at a time, it is untold generations which He reaches and revives, one after the other, like the sun when it appears at the eastern gates and illuminates a continent in one flash: a general stampede of humanity, the whole vast pocket of darkness which evacuates its population! The whole world meets and recognizes itself, the whole human family is reorganized under the eye of God . . .

All those who were about to take flight in great panic now begin to ask each other what has happened. Ah, we will not be able to hold out very long against this irresistible light! It is time for the first ranks to emerge triumphantly into the populous sky and lose, amid the fragrance of the Angels, any lingering trace of this animal odor. All that was ranged vertically in time is now ranged horizontally in space.

We later generations will find there a design which is already known, explored, and portioned out, where thousands of landmarks and familiar sights will greet us; but for these refugees from hell on Easter morning, it is the whole landscape of eternity that each new arrival must learn to survey for himself. Let us leave them to their task and follow, with one hand over our eyes, each successive band as it soars, turns, and comes to rest beyond the nebulae. As for us, we will remain bound to Jesus Christ, as intimately associated as possible with that group of patriarchs and prophets which prepared His way and can now no longer be separated from Him.

## 6

Let us remain calmly in our places while Jesus Christ, Our Lord, takes advantage of that discarded garment<sup>1</sup> to visit the most inaccessible part of the Creation and to negotiate that knot and that mighty lock which is held fast by Leviathan himself, just as on that day when, stooping to wash the feet of His disciples, He removed His outer clothes.

Presently He will appear in the flesh to the world of the flesh; but today it is in spirit that He will appear to the world of spirits, be it those demons who by their denial of God have made themselves a fitting habitation, or those untold generations of the disembodied surrounding Adam and Eve, that root transplanted from Eden, and bound to them by the teeming fertility of the original sin. They have been waiting a thousand years for deliverance from, or confirmation of, their punishment. *Descendit ad inferos:* He descended into hell, to those dwelling below.

*Poète*, 217

## 7

### *The Deliverance of the Souls*

Jesus came to bring deliverance to the multitudes below who awaited Him "in the shadow of death." Let us clearly understand the meaning of this phrase. There is death, that second death spoken of in the Apocalypse which is hell proper; and there is the shadow of death, that is, not death itself, but the shadow it casts, the physical effect produced by its proximity, that interception of the light, that paralysis resulting from a loss of direction, that accumulated sense of our own weight. We read in the Book of Acts that the shadow of Peter was sufficient to bring about healing and life; so the shadow of Satan, the dark area described by his intervention,

<sup>1</sup> The flesh.

is sufficient to spread around him paralysis and cold. It is an atmosphere, and night is mingled with the very air I breathe. Then it is that our guilty flesh, the gift of Eve, is permitted to savor the full bitterness of this phrase from the Canticle of Canticles: "I delight to rest in his shadow, and his fruit is sweet to my mouth." [2:3]

*Poète*, 226

## 8

### *The Compassion of the Good Shepherd*

The father does not abandon his child at the bottom of the well; the shepherd will contrive to recover the sheep who has fallen into the mouth of the cistern. "I will descend in mourning," says Jacob, the patriarch, "to my son in the nether world."

*Poète*, 228

## 9

It is He who, when the hour is come, rips open Purgatory and releases the millions of captive souls.

*Rose*, 123

## 10

The sinners have done not only evil, they have also done good, and often good has come out of the evil they have done, a good which sometimes has vast and far-reaching effects.

Among the elect and the damned there can be a relationship of legality, of debts and services giving rise to obligations. Will God deny to His creatures some version of the power and privilege of repaying those who have been good to us? I am well aware that we live in a state of *chaos magnum*. But on the other hand, neither the heights nor the depths shall separate us from the love of God.

Scripture shows the divine Mercy to be eternally vigilant for any opportunity to outwit its justice.

*Ev. Isaïe*, 112

## 11

### *Belief in Hell*

"But where the offense has abounded, grace has abounded yet more." [Rom. 5:20] Grace floods and fills, exalts and cleanses everything, it removes all obstacles. It is up to you, reader; I am no professional guide to lead you among the old, almost obliterated frescoes where the eye, half-bored, half-contemptuous, is caught for a moment by some amusing detail. If you do not believe in hell, you have only to leave me here and lend an ear to those guides over there who are contending for your business. You have only to let yourself go, and follow them. They are all there, the prostitute, the materialist philosopher, the man of letters, the demagogue, the drug peddler. They know the way. Just go through that door, you do not have to go through the formality of death, admission is open to the living. You have only to treat yourself to one short "season" in this spot whose charm and convenience are praised by all. True, you can't get a round-trip ticket, but once there, most of our customers feel so much at home that the matter of departure is always being postponed. "*C'était bien l'Enfer, l'ancien dont le Fils de l'Homme a ouvert les portes.*"<sup>2</sup>

*Poète*, 230

## 12

### *Hell*

Hell is that which is low, not *per accidens* but *per se*, of an essential baseness which excludes any capacity to ascend and whose physical reality merely confirms its moral image.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Rimbaud. Literally, "That was indeed Hell, that ancient place whose gates were opened by the Son of Man."

Just as movement creates space, so this fascinated absorption with that non-existent point in itself to which it is chained creates the area of the soul's captivity and the vicious circle in which it is trapped. This is what the prophet meant by the man of hell. [Cf. Isaia 5:14] "The cords of hell compassed me," it says in the Book of Kings. [II, 22:6] It is not only the passive acceptance of a situation, it is an act of the will. "We have made a pact with the nether world." [Isaia 28:15]

Here liberty is at an end, and only the Law remains with its precision which is both penal and mathematical. The possibility of higher appeal is replaced by an inflexible severity, the impossibility of either escaping or of obeying the eye of God.

*Poète*, 220

### 13

Hell is not only around us, it is within us. It is not only tomorrow, my good sirs and dear friends, that we will be in hell but immediately, as soon as mortal sin has been committed, as soon as grace has been lost. Ah, I recognize only too well all the symptoms as they have been described by the prophets, the characteristics of the climate: stupor, darkness, nausea, constriction, oppression, emptiness, pricking, itching, sticky pitch, consuming sulphur, hamstrung thighs, and in our mouths a gag of vitriol and lime—the sudden accessibility of those lower strata of our nature where dwell rage, hate, malice, and disgust! Fortunate is the man who on entering this domain loses the sight of his two eyes; but what of him who remains clear-eyed and conscious?

*Poète*, 231

### 14

#### *The Action of the Holy Spirit in Hell*

What a terrifying revelation is that of the Holy Spirit breathing on the penal flames so that the fire would burn

brighter. That breath which the Creator blew into the nostrils of Adam and which the priest imitates on the day of our baptism, that kindled flame over which our plastic form was modeled, now contends with that impenetrable corpse, that irreducible idol which our own will has carved and erected in the mocking image of God. Instead of the liquefaction and clarification of Love, we have here the calcination, the illumination, the minute and merciless accusation of Justice.

*Poète*, 223

## 15

### *Lucifer*

His habitat is the mountain of pride, or rather those swampy and congested lowlands where the spongy ground yields softly underfoot and lends, to idleness and willfulness, the unclean complicity of a moist and rotten soil. Here that friend of darkness schemes in the shade of rootless and unwholesome vegetation—among the reeds of the moment, the willows on the stream-banks that are in perpetual flight. Here he reviews his memories and brews his plans, while the carnal instincts gambol about him. As for that flowing fountain of benediction and grace, that inexhaustible baptism which heaven prepares for all the earth, he is confident that his stomach is large enough to swallow it all.

*Poète*, 110

## 16

The Book of Job shows the devil in the Eternal's presence twined around that branch in the Garden of Eden where he accomplished his greatest exploit; he is demanding the patriarch's soul in order to tempt and test him. The evangelists mention him on every page. Our Lord is content simply to wave him aside with His hand. He restores him to his place: "Get thee behind, Satan."

I see him perched like a vulture on that polluted branch of the barren tree, on the whitened sepulchers of the valley of Hinnon, or like a monkey in the palm trees of Jericho, in the turpentine trees of Samaria. Or I see him like a winking baboon picking the lice off his stomach in a corner of the Temple of Jerusalem, until Our Lord allows him, mercifully incorporated into a herd of swine, to hurl himself into the water of the lake of Tiberias.

He is that old fury who, brandishing a lantern, marches at the head of that accursed procession which sets off in search of Christ. He sits astride the shoulders of Judas, blowing into a shrill little trumpet. Next we see the Master of the world who descends in order to visit him in his home. For ultimately it is Christ who will reign over this world, that object of desire for Marxists and all atheistic social reformers, in which Justice alone will reign.

*Rose, 78*

## 17

God is the author of life, but Lucifer, if not the breath itself, is the breather. He has gotten hold of the manual. He breathes—no, I should say he *hisses*—within all creatures the spirit which he drew from the very mouth of God. He invites them to live their own existence. He tempts them with an irresistible temptation, the emulation of his own success. Harmless as yet, he is as cunning as a monkey.

*Rose, 81*

# The Third Day He Rose Again from the Dead

*Vous qui dormez, ne craignez point, parce que c'est vrai que j'ai vaincu la mort.*

*J'étais mort et je suis ressuscité dans mon âme et dans mon corps!*

*Nuit de Pâques*

IT IS Easter morning. Having completed His task in hell through His own divine power, Jesus resumes possession of His body, thereby fulfilling His promise, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." [John 2:19]

This resurrection is an event unique in all history which it dom-

inates with its radiant splendor. It is the very pole of the earth. For if indeed Elias and Eliseus performed resurrections, still they did not release their subjects from the necessity of dying later on, nor did they rise from the dead themselves. But Christ vanquished death so utterly that He is forever immune to it. "Death shall no

longer have dominion over him," says St. Paul in a triumphant tone. [Rom. 6:9]

How did Jesus look after His resurrection? Just as He did before, but glorified, that is, possessing the four qualities peculiar to glorified bodies,<sup>1</sup> while still preserving the scars of the Blessed Wounds in order to be recognized by men, and to show to His Father as a sign of intercession.

How vividly and movingly Claudel recreates that dawn when the holy women silently prepare to visit the tomb! While "the shoemaker's cock" hurls his challenge to his friend across town, "there takes place a meeting of veiled

women who exchange questions in hushed voices. Who will roll the stone back from the entrance of the tomb for us?" It is the very fragrance they bear which provides the answer," says Claudel. (*Rose*, 195) And what is the answer? "Death vanished, the grave deserted, time which now exists only to flow into Eternity." (*Ev. Isaie*, 258) "The Lord is risen from the dead. We have probed His wounds, we are buried forever in His heart." (*Emmaüs*, 132)

Such was the Resurrection of the Son of God, that "awe-inspiring miracle on which the whole of Christian faith depends." (*Toi*, 20)

## 1

### *Easter Day*

Let us lie still with our eyes closed a moment before dawn breaks on the day of the Resurrection. It is yet night, but already someone is stirring in two or three houses in Jerusalem. Lamps are being lit, and women are hurriedly dressing and combing their hair. The Sabbath is over, and one incomparable star irradiates the upturned face of our first Sunday. The shoemaker's cock prepares to take up the challenge flung at him by his friend on the other side of the Cedron. It is no longer Passover, it is Easter! Look, listen: in the Hebraic stillness there takes place, at the joining of three roads, a meeting of veiled women who exchange questions in hushed voices. "Who will roll the stone back from the entrance?" [Mark 16:3] Who will take it away? The very fragrance they bear

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter, "The Resurrection of the Body."

provides the answer. It is this irresistible quality of hope in their hearts, this emanation of mysterious ingredients prepared in the bosom of the night by the very hands of the dawn. Stored up for centuries, slowly expanding, this sacred chemistry which just now rose from sleep advances to triumph over death.

As for the remaining events of that wondrous morning, thanks to the bewildered and incoherent echo of the four interwoven Gospels, they reverberate to this day in every church in Christendom.

*Rose, 195*

## 2

### *Victory*

The sun is risen. "O death! where is thy sting?" The grave is empty. "O truly blessed night, thou alone wast worthy to know the hour and the moment when Christ was risen from hell!"<sup>2</sup> Death is vanished, the grave deserted, time now exists only to flow into Eternity: is this not an event that resounds to the very ends of the earth, shaking all foundations, and robbing humanity of all possibility of yielding to the ancient despair? It is done; I promise you that all that is at an end! Ah, I swear that it is come, the day of wrath and indignation!

*Ev. Isaïe, 258*

## 3

### *Mary and the Resurrection*

Just as I know that the living Mary died with Christ, I am sure that she rose with Him from the dead. Just as on the pathway of the cross she did not merely follow her Son, she preceded Him, just as on Calvary she stretched forth her arms to detain Him, so in the heart of that first tabernacle and

<sup>2</sup> Liturgy of Holy Saturday.

that moment which no human eye was allowed to see, I am sure she was there to share it with the Angels. The Church was standing by in attendance. Just as she stood on Calvary to witness His sacrifice, so she stood in the grave to witness His resurrection.

And we, whose faith assures us that God did not create us only to die, know that in the hour of our need Mary will be standing by to teach us how to be reborn.

*Rose, 197*

## 4

### *The Foundation of Our Faith*

The only man in all creation who ever dared call Himself the Son of God dies before our eyes under the most sordid, cruel, and humiliating circumstances, and in the most utter abandonment. It is obvious that His doctrine could not be permitted to remain in the shadow of such a grievous defeat of its author, such a total contradiction of its assertions. For unlike other religions, ours consisted less in a body of affirmations which imposed themselves on the world than in the personality of the Man who came to bring them to us. The score had to be evened, some sort of proof given, that this man who called Himself the Son of God had not been defeated. And indeed we do not find that Christ's death was followed by the least discouragement on the part of His disciples. There were no interpretations, no far-fetched explanations, no elaborate consolations or justifications. His death did not give rise to those disagreements, conflicts, and divisions of opinion which would have been the inevitable result of a lie. On the contrary, His death was immediately seen as a striking and triumphant corroboration of His teachings. There prevailed among His disciples an altogether new and unanimous spirit of exhilaration, of overflowing joy, of indomitable confidence, of energetic enterprise. What was this new fact, this new success that came hard on the catastrophe of Calvary?

St. Paul tells us that it was the Resurrection, that awe-inspiring miracle on which the whole Christian faith depends.

*Toi*, 20

## 5

### *Characteristics of the Risen Christ*

The Lord is risen from the dead. Yes, we know that He is truly risen. We have touched Him with our hands, we have probed His wounds, we are buried forever in His heart. He has taken fish and honey at our table. And at the same time He passes through closed doors, distance does not exist for Him, and He can withdraw from our senses at will.

*Emmaüs*, 132

## 6

### *The Reality of His Resurrected Flesh*

I write these lines during the Easter season. The Gospels which are read to us at Mass show us the Lord continually appearing and disappearing before the eyes of His disciples, "though the doors had been closed." [John 20:19] It was not only from their eyes that He was free to withdraw, but from all their senses, especially the sense of touch, the appraiser of space and dimension, of volume and mass.

Faith informs us that this flesh and body were perfectly real but that, without ceasing to serve as the hypostatic support of the soul, they possessed the ability to be perceptible or not to our various empirical sentries. Just as here on earth we do not continually consider our bodies, so in heaven it will be optional to a glorified being to consider or not, to realize or not, a body which is accessible to our present organs of perception. The body of Christ was not, as the Nestorians claimed, like a garment which could be doffed or donned at will. It was and continues to be joined to the soul in a substantial union. Hence in St. John [10:17-18], Our Lord does

not say that He has the power to lay down His body and take it up again (as He did, however, during the three days He remained in the tomb); He says that He has the power to lay down His life (that is, His soul) and take it up again.

His soul always remains the master of His body: it never ceases to do whatever is necessary to produce the body, it maintains physical and spiritual contact with the body, it is in full control of its own power to beget, apprehend, and employ the body, of its *informative* power.

Moreover, even when the body of Christ is in the tomb, at the mercy of the laws of matter, that which irradiates the nether world is not the Word alone, but the soul inseparably joined to the expression provided by the body it received from the Virgin Mary. It would be impossible to deprive the soul of the power it exercises over the body, and of which it never ceases for a moment to be in full possession. While the soul advances to the rescue of those multitudes in hell who are gathered to await it, it is expressed on the funeral slab by a dead body, just as previously it was expressed at the Last Supper or before Pilate by an active, living body.

The soul never ceases to belong to the body or to hold over it a right of repossession which indeed it stands ready to exercise at a moment's notice. Even in this moment of separation, the Father continues to regard the Son as Someone indissolubly united to, hypostasized in a human body. He is the Cause who temporarily withholds His effects with regard to this corporal person which He has laid aside, but continues to have at His disposal. And when we in turn are reborn in the image of Him who is "first born from the dead," our glorified bodies will no longer be the masters of our souls, but will depend entirely on our souls, which in turn will depend entirely on that God who is the direct source and wellspring of their existence.

It is only in relation to God, and as subject to this creative cause, that we will be able to provide ourselves with a person, an unvarying self consisting of one soul and one

body, and to realize ourselves as such. Our milieu in the heart of this new heaven and earth foretold by the prophet will no longer be the one in which we now lead our mortal life and in which the Apostles were immersed at the time of Christ's appearances. Substance will then be in command of its accidents such as consistency, dimension, color, but within the limitations of that blessed role determined by its individual vocation. No longer will it be rigged to withstand the shocks and hazards of this present existence on the troubled sea of second causes. It will have only to live a blessed existence at the source, to share and publish abroad that particular image of God which it is called upon to provide.

Does not modern science teach us that living matter is simply a mass of movements adapted to the organization and preservation of our various organs and senses? We will no longer be the blind slaves of this continuous pattern of rhythms and emanations, but the conscious and intelligent masters.

*Apocalypse, 187-188*

# He Ascended into Heaven, and Sitteth at the Right Hand of God, the Father Almighty

*Nous prenons place à notre tour au banquet de l'amour éternel.  
Hommes de Galilée, que regardez-vous dans le Ciel?*

*Corona, 37*

THE Gospel tells us that forty days after His Resurrection Our Lord, having assembled His Apostles on the Mount of Olives, rose from their midst and disappeared in a cloud.

It must be understood that the miracle consists in the fact that He rose to heaven not as God (having never ceased to be God),

but as Man, body and soul; and rose by His own power, and not by a borrowed power, as was the case with Elias and Henoch.

The phrase "seated at the right hand of God" gives us an idea of the pre-eminent honor Jesus received from His Father and of how by this act His blessed Humanity was placed above all else.

What is the point of the Ascension? It is to crown Christ's work of redemption, and also to show us that His Kingdom and the one He promised to His elect is not of this world. In this way He spiritualizes our love and fortifies our hope, while at the same time He receives the greatest degree of glory for His work of redemption.

"This body, seemingly fashioned for the earth," Claudel tells us fervently, the Son of God "was able to take with Him to heaven." (*Emmaüs*, 134) And what was

His parting message? "Where I am, there also shall my servant be.' And lo, all creatures feel deep within them this summons, this injunction to ascend." (*Présence*, 311)

Too long in this low place have we been the slaves of gravity, Claudel adds, while continuing to feel within us "a certain propensity for blessed suspension and flight." The time has come to follow our Master and to take that hand "which has mighty dominion over Hell." (*Rose*, 201; *Poète*, 113)

# 1

## *Christ's Humanity in Heaven*

The Man-God, the Word indissolubly joined in hypostatic union to the flesh received from Mary, appears after His ascension seated at the right hand of His Father. "Seated at the right hand" is, of course, only a metaphor which is inadequate to describe that intimate union, that essential relationship on which the Trinity rests and by which, if I may use the word, It functions: a union of which something human is henceforth a permanent member. Now it is no longer the Word alone, but the Word made flesh which, by means of the Holy Spirit, draws from the Father the breath with which to express Him to Himself.

## 2

*Jesus Tells the Father About Us*

Communication has been established. Now there is at the Father's right hand a voice to explain this new acquisition and extension of His Son, this Passover which He so longed to take with us, this sin which was somehow unspeakably translated into love, this enriched declension of His Word, this bridal bouquet which sacrifices to Him its sweetness! A voice, and I could also say an ear: a divine ear within us pressed to our heart, a divine ear within us pressed to the heart of God!

*Rose, 205*

## 3

*Our Flesh Borne to Heaven Through Christ*

This human body to which we owe our redemption, and through which God Himself owes us the means of our redemption, this lump of clay fairly purchased for thirty pieces of silver by the hand of the authorized representative, accompanied the Son of Man when He ascended to the right hand of His Father. This body, seemingly fashioned for the earth, the Son was able to take with Him to heaven and have it draw its life directly from the Father. But what was His parting message? "Where I am, there also shall my servant be." We are one with Him who Himself is one with the other two Persons of the Trinity.

*Emmaüs, 134*

## 4

*Christ Draws All Things to Himself*

"You have ascended on high, taken captives, received men as gifts," says the Psalmist. [67:19] The Man-God, highest expression of Creation, rises from the depths of matter

where the Word was born by uniting with woman's obedience, toward that throne which was predestined for Him at the right hand of the Father. From this position He continues to exercise His magnetic power on all creatures: all feel deep within them that summons, that injunction, to ascend.

*Présence*, 311

## 5

### *Mary and the Ascension*

"It is expedient for you that I depart," the Master told His disciples, "and no one of you asks me 'where art thou going?'" This question, which they had forgotten to ask until the very moment when the wounded feet disappeared in the luminous cloud, the Church now undertakes to answer, and each answer provokes fresh questions, more numerous and more eager: Where has your Beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Answer us, Mary! Take up in your hands this bead of our rosary that you may consider it with care. Tell us where He has gone. And if, for answer, you place your finger on that line of golden letters running across the purpled parchment, "I ascend to my Father and your Father," and if at these words a pathway appears beneath our feet, then lead us, we pray; plant your pilgrim's staff as a landmark at every step, that it may shield us from the pitfalls on either side, for since this place is no longer our permanent home, we cannot wait until all things cease to be obstacles and become stepping stones.

*Cantique*, 244

## 6

### *We Are Invited to Ascend*

Jesus' Ascension toward His Father and our own ascension in which we are invited to follow Him are not limited to a given moment in time. Ascension in Him, as in us, is the

result of a certain tension, a certain attraction *ad extra*, a certain longing to be swept away and carried off almost in spite of ourselves. It is like a swimmer who, his lungs fully expanded and resting on this gulf of air which fills him, rises out of the depths. *Sursum corda!* The invitation is extended to us every day at Mass. And Colossians tell us to "seek the things that are above, where Christ is." *Trahe me!* Draw me to you, says the Sulamite. And indeed the Lord tells us that when He is lifted up from the earth, He will draw all things to Him.

Rose, 200

## 7

Too long in this low place we have been the slaves of gravity and the law of matter. Too long we have been at the mercy of chance and vanity. The time has come for us to take our flight, body and soul, towards our higher Cause. St. Augustine told us long ago that the foundations of the City of God, unlike the one we creep about in now, are not beneath our feet but above our heads, and that we are drawn and ordered there according to our burden of love and our degree of glory.

Long ago a certain inner voice warned us in a dream that we were not fashioned for inertia, but for suspension, for the perfect use of our mass, for a blessed state of equilibrium, for flight, for the enjoyment of a certain faculty of perception, for a total awareness, for a condensation and expansion of our will which provides both perfect control within and acute sensitivity to the harmonies without. It is time that weight cease to be our doom and become instead our most delicate instrument of perception. Authors at present only of ourselves, it is now time for us to translate God with the help of our physical and material selves, bathed forever in the perfection of our understanding and our role.

Rose, 201

# From Thence He Shall Come to Judge the Living and the Dead

*C'est le jour du Jugement où le Seigneur considère toute la terre,  
Et où l'Intendant doit montrer ses comptes au propriétaire.*

*Odes, 193*

As Jesus Himself declared, there will be a Judgment or, more precisely, two judgments: an initial individual judgment at our death, and a general judgment at the end of the world, that the Justice of God may blaze forth in the eyes of all.

The Bible tells us that it is Christ Himself who will judge us:

"He it is who has been appointed by God to be judge of the living and of the dead." [Acts 10:42]

After the warning signals—the preaching of the Gospel to the whole world, apostasy, the appearance of Antichrist—"Our Lord will appear in all His glory and will say to those on the one hand, "Come, blessed of my Fa-

ther, take possession of the Kingdom prepared for you" and to those on the other, "Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire." [Matt. 25:34, 41]

While the elect will receive the reward of their good work, the reprobate will suffer a double punishment: the pain of damnation, or deprivation of the presence of God, and the pain of the senses, or unremitting torment at the hands of the demons.

Do we not all have within us a powerful and deep-seated need to be judged? Claudel knew it well, and was able to express it with incomparable force: "Straw does not surrender to the flame, nor does lime fuse more eagerly with sand, than the guilty soul craves its punishment. . . . On the day of the Last Judgment it is not only that the Judge will descend from heaven, but the whole world will rush forth to meet Him." (*Apocalypse*, 180)

It will be the H-hour of Justice and even at his own expense, each man will long for its full realization.

"It is this hunger for justice and confession which grips the bowels of the earth," Claudel adds (*Epée*, 183), which will then demand its due from the only Judge who understands the secrets of the human heart. "Nothing will escape that accusing shaft of light, the blinding countenance of the Author of all things" (*Ibid.*, 160), that two-edged sword which St. John saw issuing from the mouth of Christ, "made of a steel purer than those Japanese blades" which the warrior shielded from his breath for fear of dulling them. (*Ibid.*, 10)

Happy, then, is the man who "has learned through faith to be one with Christ . . . and who lends himself fully to His image." (*Rose*, 198) As for the man who has distorted this image, he will be committed to an unrelenting fire. "The flame will force from us that transparence we denied to the light." (*Epée*, 173) Severe trial! "As between the jaws of a vise, the sinner finds himself held fast between his beginning and his end, between his *raison d'être* and his personal vocation." (*Ibid.*, 174)

## 1

### *Universal Need for Judgment*

It is not only the righteous who desire the end of the world! Though we all need mercy, I think we have an even greater need for justice. All that proceeds from the Creator

needs the Judge and the examining eye of definitive criticism. "The works of his hands are faithful and just." [Psalms 110:7] Straw does not surrender to the flame, nor does lime fuse more eagerly with sand, than the guilty soul craves its punishment. "Your justice is like the mountains of God," says the Psalmist. [35:7] And what are the exact words placed in the mouths of the sinners by the Apocalypse, and the Gospel as well: "Mountains, fall upon us!" On the day of the Last Judgment it is not only that the Judge will descend from heaven, but the whole world will rush forth to meet him.

*Apocalypse*, 180

## 2

### *We Must Pay Our Debts*

We must all pay our debts; we must pay to the last penny. The steward in Christ's parable is not more stern and unsparing than that law imposed on us by brotherly love which we must all obey and execute. If we have been wanting in charity, we must present ourselves for purgation. It is the whole crew, the whole company, which must prepare for Hell-hour. And no longer will we be able to excuse ourselves on the grounds of lack of strength, intelligence, or will power. The fire will be there to make up for our deficiencies, to melt and illuminate all things; that fire for which we will serve at once as fuel and stokers.

*Epée*, 178

## 3

### *The Need for Justice Throughout Nature*

It is necessary that the scales be equally balanced between heaven and earth, and that one return to the other as much as it has received. It is this hunger for justice and confession which grips the bowels of the earth and expresses itself in eruptions and convulsions, those cramps and colics of

nature which are represented by mountainous masses. Nothing in nature was made to rest content in itself. There is no living substance which does not struggle to break out of its mold. "I announced your justice in the vast assembly . . . your justice I kept not hid within my heart." [Psalms 39:10-11]

*Epée*, 183

## 4

### *God Sees All*

Nothing escapes that accusing shaft of light, that blinding countenance of the Author of all things, that God who like Gedeon's soldiers stooped to place His lips to the infernal fount. In vain the amphibian people attempt to bury themselves in the mud, and the monstrous serpents seek the protection of their own nests. Nothing, of all the monstrosities and deformities wrought by evil, escapes the eye of the Judge.

*Epée*, 160

## 5

### *The Judgment Seat*

"I lift up my eyes toward the mountains: whence shall help come to me?" What mountains? It is they who make up that great white throne described by the visionary of Patmos, it is on them that Christ, on the day of His Parousia, will sit in judgment on the world. Courage, you who are baptized! What you build for me with snow, I will carve out from within with fire.

*Rose*, 150

## 6

### *The Universe Restored to Christ*

The whole creation, that tide which carries us along with all the rest towards the final composition, is raised, redressed, and returned to its Maker, so that all may be restored to the Father in the person of the Son. This is the justice for which Jesus thirsts and which the Psalmist described when he said, "For you my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless, and without water. Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory." [62:1-3]

*Poète*, 132

## 7

### *The Sword of the Son of God*

That formidable weapon in the hand of the Word,<sup>1</sup> must deal the deathblow to whatever in us is mortal, the product of flesh allied with sin. This weapon also becomes the instrument of judgment and achieves its work in us in spite of our pain and resistance. It is unyielding, it is true, it is incorruptible, it is made of a steel purer than those Japanese blades which the warrior never touched without covering his breath with tissue paper for fear of dulling them. It has an edge designed to pierce our successive layers right to the heart and bowels, or until it has reached that vital spot which, in some, is indeed the heart but which in others is buried in the viscera.

*Epée*, 10

<sup>1</sup> A reference to the sword that issues from Christ's mouth in the Apocalypse 3:16.

## 8

*Liber Scriptus*

We hand over to the clear-sighted Judge a document which He can examine line by line. There is not an event or action in our lives which was not noted down somewhere in full detail. This is the *Liber scriptus*, a sort of dossier which will accompany us when we emerge from the grave. This explains the salutary effect of relics and saints' bones which, like a vessel saturated with a powerful fragrance, continue to give off that love which dominated their growth, that unction which penetrated their marrow, that gift of communication which, in death as in life, is the prerogative of the pious.

*Poète*, 216

## 9

*The Soul's Speech in Its Defense*

*From unjust and deceitful men, deliver me.* O Lord, disengage the true man from this false and deceitful, shallow and evasive, lustful and selfish individual which I have succeeded in constructing in anything but Your image! Oh, if only You could rid me of it once and for all; it is something that I have only managed to shed for these three quarters of an hour, along with that overcoat beside me on the seat. . . . What have I done since the last Mass, what road have I traveled by yielding to Your enemies, *and why do I go about in sadness, while the enemy afflicts me?*

*Epée*, 68

## 10

*Judge me, O God!* This opening phrase of the Mass is also the first cry of the soul as it casts off the flesh to resume it later in its final ordination; as it lays aside all other laws and

injunctions but that of appearing before its Creator, clad only in the completion of its works and the nakedness of its essential truth. Since now he must draw his whole life from the Father, happy is the man who has learned through faith to become one with the Son! Happy is the man who, beneath his Mother's eye, gives himself passionately to the full image of Christ which is now demanded of him, and who fully embraces the organic transformation required by the new role he is now assigned! He feels expanding within him those lungs with which he may inhale the Father through the mouth of Jesus Christ.

*Rose*, 198

## 11

### *The Refining Fire*

The purpose of the fire, when it is not purely and simply to obliterate our outward form, is to expand, open, melt, break down, and overcome the form through the yielding of the flesh and the resistance of the spirit, to refine by destroying or separating whatever is irrelevant or unnecessary. This is why God chooses to compare Himself to this penetrating and all-powerful element. "For the Lord our God is a consuming fire," we read in Deuteronomy. [4:24] And St. Peter speaks of the fire which will judge the world by destroying it. [Cf. II Peter 3:7] These heavens and this earth are destined for the fire on the day of Judgment, and even now present themselves for the refinement of the very texture of our souls and our deeds.

*Poète*, 121

## 12

### *The Outer Fire*

The funeral pyre which the pagans felt compelled to erect for their dead awaits us Christians in the next world,

and it is our own works which will provide its fuel. The outer fire will conspire with the flame within us to break down and recast that idol which we have substituted for the image of God. The flame will force from us that transparency we denied to the light.

*Epée*, 173

## 13

### *The Inner Fire*

So much for the outer fire which is the expression of God's terrible love for His creature and His need for him in his original form. Corresponding to that outer fire, however, there is a fire within us.

I am referring to remorse and painful self-examination, the children of memory and conscience, and which find such perfect expression in the penitential Psalms.

"Their works follow them," we are told in the Apocalypse [14:13], because they become part of us, as in the old adage that habit is second nature, and it is precisely this second nature, like the eighteen-year curvature and contraction of that daughter of Abraham who appears in the Gospel, which we must throw off—no easy matter! The hospitals and clinics overflow with these masses of the broken-down, the twisted, the endless casualties which would provide us with illustrations, if we needed them: some encased in armor and plaster casts, others lying flat on their backs in their own excrement and that inner putrefaction which endlessly consumes their bones. Time is required before any part of improvement or semblance of a cure can be reached.

But now it is not merely the body but the soul which must be corrected. As between the jaws of a vise, the sinner finds himself held fast between his beginning and his end, between his reason for existence and his personal vocation.

*Epée*, 174

## 14

*The Work of Redemption*

We spoke earlier of one of those factories with shafts sunk into the fertile veins of the earth and smokestacks combining the sky like narrows whose thick fumes are occasionally illumined by a blast of fire. Now we have been conducted inside the shop, and it is up to us to figure out the complicated machinery, some lying idle for repair, some turning the wheel in a series of precise and unerring movements—all glistening with oil, all responding to the pulleys, to the driving shaft, to the electric current, and to the double-time rhythm which, like the furious fingers of a virtuoso on the keys of a piano, animates this whole mechanical process. A single message from the brain has issued the order to these materials which have been pressed into service. The whole world has become part of the machine.

All this is only a clumsy metaphor (we could just as easily have used a chemical analogy: that whole laboratory of baths, acids, and fermentations) for the enormous job of repair which the divine mercy must undertake on all those cartloads of cracked, bruised, rusty, twisted, and dislocated souls. The Psalmist refers to "corrupt vessels," evoking an image of jagged fragments, staved-in saucepans, and half-flattened tin cans which litter rubbish heaps; it is this stream of immortal refuse which is furnished to His ovens every day by the overflow of the cemeteries.

It is an infinitely delicate operation, because not only is it necessary to salvage the original purpose and intention which we have so miserably sabotaged, but it is also necessary to make use of the sin itself and of that absurd handiwork (contrary to all art and judgment) which we have practiced on ourselves for so long.

# I Believe in the Holy Ghost

*O ami . . . je suis l'Amour qui est au-dessus de toute parole.*  
*Odes, 74*

THE Holy Spirit is the third person of the Blessed Trinity, possessed of the same divine nature but distinct from the other two in that the Father begets, the Son is begotten, and the Holy Spirit emanates from the Father and the Son. He is the essence of Their love.

By virtue of a single act common to the Father and the Son, an

act of the will or of love, the Holy Spirit is said to proceed from the Father and the Son. St. Bernard writes in his commentary on the Canticle of Canticles, "If we imagine the Father bestowing the kiss and the Son receiving it, the Holy Spirit will be this kiss itself, since He is the indissoluble bond, the inseparable love, and the in-

divisible unity between the Father and the Son."

We read in the Book of Genesis that the Holy Spirit took part in the Creation. [1:2] Since then He continues to guide the world and to speak through the prophets. *Qui locutus est per prophetas*, as we are told by the first Ecumenical Councils.

At Pentecost, in accordance with Jesus' promise, He came upon the Apostles in an altogether unique manner to illuminate them, to fortify their faith, and to give unity to the nascent Church.

The Holy Spirit is the quickening and sanctifying soul of the Mystical Body: Christians are temples in which He never ceases to act by means of divine Grace, assisting them all towards their blessed eternity. He acts on us primarily by means of His gifts—Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord—which heighten the activity of our minds and wills. In the liturgy He is called "our soul's most gracious host" who corrects our mistakes, strengthens our weakness, rekindles our ardor.

Difficult as it is to give any idea of the Holy Spirit by means of a metaphor, since He is so subtle and inaccessible to our senses, He is commonly represented by the image of fire, because of the form He took at Pentecost: "the fire which illuminates, which penetrates, which melts and welds, this is how He appears to Moses and

later to Elias and the other prophets as well." (*Cantique*, 325) Nothing can resist the solicitation of this flame. On all of these chosen ones the Holy Spirit descends like a bird of prey, tearing them from their personal plans, and sometimes assigning them overwhelming tasks. If they lack eloquence, behold, the tongue of fire supplies the deficiency. Is it any wonder then, asks Claudel, that "the Holy Spirit cannot enter us without sounding the full range and diapason of our souls, or leave us without calling forth from our depths that intelligible sound which is a word?" (*Epée*, 40)

This is the brand that inflamed the saints, "this is the spark with which the seraphim's spear, to the anguish of Francis and Thérèse, will be able to kindle a great conflagration." (*Emmaüs*, 298)

It is the Holy Spirit who surrounds us, hemms us in, assails us in a thousand ways, now gentle and delicate, now violent and tempestuous, as it assailed that Pharisee flung to the ground on the road to Damascus: "I am at the mercy of One who demands all that is mortal in me in order that He may make it immortal. . . . Sobbing in the flames, I embrace the Septenary Spirit!" (*Cantique*, 356) Later this same Paul will "scatter in all directions the burning seed, the spark and the coal, the vein and the wick of that fire which will utterly ravish him on the last day." (*Ibid.*)

Quicken and sanctifying Spirit, He is also unifying, as was revealed at the Cenacle: "Of old, the Tower of Babel had marked the introduction of particularity and disorder," and behold at Pen-

tecost "He restores to the Church all these scattered tongues, *disperitiae linguae*, to make of them a single flame." (*Ruth*, 94) In this incandescent crucible is wrought the *Ecclesia una et sancta*.

## I

### *The Holy Spirit Is Love*

The Holy Spirit is love, and love is properly a longing or *intention* toward someone. Thus when God sends His Spirit, when He directs toward some particular point this finger of the Father's right hand, He is sending a longing, an invitation to all things that exist to exist in relation to Him and in dependence on Him. It is this necessity and this need that is represented or released by the appearance of a dove above a baptistry, or the breath of the priest, or the tongue of fire, or a given sacred text which we inhale. I opened my mouth and drew forth the Spirit. The combined forces and faculties of our personality immediately conspire with this desire, as we have already read in the Canticle of Canticles: "Let him kiss me with kisses of his mouth!"

He has ordered everything in me with respect to love. Thus when a vacuum is created in Mary by the words, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to Thy word!" it is the Holy Spirit mingled with that rush of air who fills her, who directs the charity that is in her and prepares all the forces of her body and soul for the realization of Jesus. She conspires with this inspiration: she conceives of the Holy Spirit.

## 2

*The Spirit on the Waters*

In the second verse of the first chapter of Genesis it says that "The Spirit of God was stirring above the water." Are we to believe that He is absent from them now, or that He could have divorced Himself so easily from that element—not only from those material waters but from those other tides which swell in the Apocalypse, which are "the tongues, the nations, and the tribes"? He was there above these waters, borne on them and penetrating to the roots of their being to prevent them from serving anything but the glory of God. He was there and He is there still. He was there and still is, transforming history into song, chaos into melody, and incoherence into assent. He is there to bring all things to their completion.

*Rose, 214*

## 3

*The Holy Spirit and Christ*

It is not in the body that the Son is united to the Father, but in the Spirit, in that breathing which is common to them. He draws inexhaustibly, from the very mouth of His Progenitor, the formative reason for that enduring flesh with which a mortal mother nourished His hypostasis for eternity.

*Rose, 181*

## 4

*The Holy Spirit as Fire*

From end to end the Holy Scriptures can find no better way of representing the direct effect of God on the soul than

by the operation of fire. Ezechiel even goes so far as to compare it to an electrical phenomenon.

This is the fire which inflamed the twelve Apostles on the day of Pentecost and transformed them into inextinguishable torches; the flame that suddenly broke forth over their heads on that holy day was the emanation of their own souls which, having arrived at a supreme state of vibration, burst into being at the touch of the divine spark.

*Poète*, 275

## 5

Throughout the Bible, fire is used to represent that God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush. "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire," we are told in Deuteronomy [14:24] and again in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in Exodus, and in the theophanic prophecies. "The glory of the Lord was seen as a consuming fire." [Ex. 24:17] Fire is the element that seizes, surrounds, and penetrates; it is the outward form and inward quality of love. Its attributes are heat, light, penetration, merciless examination, and destruction. It is the medium through which God appears and communicates with us, by which He expresses Himself, searches us, sounds us, smells us, tastes us, holds us fast, speaks to us, questions us, expands us, and embraces us.

This explains why that sacramental fire, distributed to us at confirmation, is in the form of a tongue. The fire has come down from Sinai; somehow it has been divided up and portioned out like bread, that each of us may have his share.

*Sophie*, 163

## 6

A fire which unifies in Paradise, purifies in Purgatory, and calcifies in Hell.

*Trois figures*, 91

## 7

"Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his garments not be burned?" [Prov. 6:27] Only the Church of God has been able to fashion this Pentecostal fire into a sacrament whose spark she plants deep in every Christian heart. A spark which the seraphim's spear, to the anguish of Francis and Thérèse, will be able to kindle into a great conflagration. This fire, which was the joyous mantle of St. Joan of Arc, is praised in song by the Fool of Assisi, and by St. John of the Cross in *The Living Flame of Love*, who borrow the accents of the Easter Vigil service. What is the purpose of the fire which the Saviour brought to earth, if not to burn? For only when He has thoroughly cleansed us with this fire on the day of Judgment will the Father recognize us as His own handiwork.

*Emmaüs*, 298

## 8

*The Prick of the Spirit*

"The truth shall make you free!" [John 8:32] It is this work of liberation which that sudden invasion by fire on the day of Pentecost was to complete. There fell upon that room full of men and women—just as on us, without our being aware of it, in the middle of our confirmation—a turbulence of scattered tongues and every one of us received his own! God came to pierce each soul; it was His way of opening a passage for Himself! He made a puncture in each of our mouths. He came to provide an outlet for that inner force which is the source of our being and awareness, and which deep down has never stopped responding to the primordial Fiat of His will.

*Rose*, 206

**9**

Someone has clarified us, someone has placed in our mouths a tongue which speaks clearly and distinctly. Someone has placed in our mouths an insatiable organ which transforms into intelligibility all it takes, all that our minds and bodies force us to go outside to seek. This tongue, this flame not only dissolves things by breaking them down into their component parts, it not only refines them by rendering them assimilable to the spirit, but translates them once and for all into the written word, invests them with a meaning independent of time and eternally comprehensible, transforms them into a text and a Scripture.

*Rose, 207*

**10**

Grant, O my God, that I may make good use of that tongue of flame You have placed in my mouth! May I become a tuning fork, may I vibrate from head to foot in giving the right note, the sincere confession, the invincible Credo. Since You have provided oil in which is immersed a seven-ply wick, what now prevents me from being a lamp? You have not placed this tongue in my mouth for me to gag or champ on, like the blasphemers of the Apocalypse. I received it this morning in order to commune with You! Let it then serve to clarify me, to draw from me heat and light, sound and scent, and not to waste and consume me in foul and blackened suffocation!

*Rose, 208*

**11*****How It Operates on Man***

When the Apostles are gathered at the Cenacle after ten days' retirement and the divine Spirit descends on them, it

takes only a moment for contact to be made, and for that flame rooted in their hearts to burst forth from their brows. What a variety of ways they have of coming together, two pairs of lips exhaling a double breath! The reaper Habacuc struggles in the grip of the angel of God, and Jona contends with all his might against those wings which would tear him from the earth; Jeremia, however, is chosen from the moment of his conception, and we see Isaia ensconced pen in hand, as it were, right in the bosom of the Trinity; and how many pious women must pay with a long period of barrenness for that prophet demanded of them by some passage of Scripture!

*J'aime*, 93

## 12

The spirit through which God created the world by breathing on it (like the priest who with his lips and his lungs forms the letter *psi* on the baptismal font) continues to move among us. It is the great south wind which has swelled the sails of the Church since the day of the Pentecost. Now it is a gale which uproots oak trees, now the enameler's blowpipe, or the sudden incarnation of the irresistible scene of roses. . . . A word, less than that, the shape of a word: it was enough.

*Poète*, 242

## 13

It was the Holy Spirit that summoned Christ from the womb of the Virgin Mary, and it is Christ Himself who in turn summons, gathers, and animates that Church which is His collective body, and which is roused, united, and animated by faith in a single head and participation in the selfsame sacraments.

*Poète*, 242

## 14

The twofold illuminating and unifying virtue of the Holy Spirit may be expressed by a single image: fire which illumines and penetrates, which melts and welds. God appears in this form throughout the Old Testament; in Exodus, for example, we read: "*Erat species gloria Domini quasi ignis ardens.*" This is how He appeared to Moses and later to Elias and other prophets as well.

What does it want from us, this eternal fire? It does not claim, it reclaims: it reclaims that image of God whose spark we have each received and which it is our individual duty to restore to Him. He pursues us insistently for what is rightfully His. But how will we be able to meet this demand with our finite powers? The Pentecostal Hymn gives the answer: *Fons vivus, ignis, caritas.* God is not only above us as a demand, He is within us as a source, a living source, a source of living water, says St. John, a source of fire, springing up unto life everlasting. But what if this source is blocked, blocked by that irreducible obstacle which is our free will? The fire will not then cease to be a destroying, devouring fire, but turns against this obstacle to subject it to the fixity of Hell. "I have brought out fire from your midst which will devour you," says Ezechiel [28:18] and Isaia, "*Spiritus vester*" (note this *vester*, it refers to *our* spirit, *our* peculiar vocation which we have failed) "*ut ignis devorabit vos.*"

*Cantique*, 335

## 15

The fiery Spirit is not only a destructive but a constructive element. We see this at Pentecost when all those men and women were gathered in one room, with the Blessed Virgin above them like a great distaff, winding off all these glowing filaments, twisting and tying them around herself, fashioning

all these varied hues into a single bolt, and sending them to heaven in a flaming spiral.

*Rose*, 213

## 16

The commandment to love God with all our strength, to the limits of our individual capacity, does not extend simply to man, but to all nature which was created for no other reason than to glorify Him, to reveal Him, to love Him, and to annihilate itself in confession, devotion, and regeneration. And it is up to us, seasoned, stirred, sharpened and whetted by the breath of the Holy Spirit, to apply to the universe that fiery tongue capable of translating it and transmuting it into splendor, fragrance, song, poetry, and praise.

*Rose*, 212

## 17

All that the Father has wrought in me, all that He has devised to let me be His son and to be born into the understanding of Him, the how and the why, the Spirit is there to explain it all, to instill it in me, to impart it to my soul.

*Cantique*, 333

## 18

### *The Sweetness of the Spirit*

Ah, Jerusalem, with what perfumed fingers you have learned to touch our hearts! It is love alone; I recognize its musical fingers which hold the keys to our liberty in either hand. Looking high and low I can see there is no way to escape love. "Releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke." [Isaia 58:6] All this is the wondrous work of the Holy Spirit which is celebrated in the rapturous hymn of Pentecost.

That spiritual liberty which alone matters (thanks to which I am both witness and agent), frees the body that is bathed in it from the body's own weight.

*Ev. Isaïe*, 272

## 19

The Holy Spirit makes its way through all our outer appearances until it reaches the soul, until it reaches whatever nourishment the soul has to offer it, which it absorbs utterly into itself. It is a glowing breath which penetrates, dilates, pacifies, clarifies, and places in a state of suspension, order, and clear visibility the various faculties of our nature, allowing nothing to resist its divine Cause.

*Cantique*, 266

## 20

### *Eloquence*

It is not without significance that the Holy Spirit appeared to us in the form of a tongue. "For the Spirit of the Lord is all-embracing," we are told in the Book of Wisdom [1:7] It surrounds all things, holds them together, and comprehends them, inseparable as it is from the engendering word, "and knows man's utterance," in other words, the art of voice.

*Présence*, 72

## 21

### *Our Receptivity*

Is there a gift more precious than that perfect vacuum of love, that capacity, that receptivity which no longer offers any obstacle to the will of its Creator? Since "the Spirit of the lord is all-embracing and knows man's utterance," is it any wonder that the Holy Spirit cannot enter us without sounding

the full range and diapason of our souls, or leave us without calling forth from our depths that intelligible sound which is a word?

*Epée*, 40

## 22

### *The Inspiration of the Scriptures*

We who are faithful Catholics know the Author of the Scriptures to be the Holy Spirit. What a dazzling, remarkable privilege we enjoy in possessing, bound in the pages of a book, that Holy Spirit of whom it is said that He is capable of suggesting all things to us! With what faith, with what reverence, with what fervor should we consult it! It is not just a word of advice, it is a commandment we are given when the Lord tells us to study the Scriptures. He did not mean a hurried glance but an impassioned study to which we would be well advised to bring all the resources not merely of our own minds and hearts (that would be little enough), but of doctrine and liturgy which the Church majestically unfolds for us.

*Accompagnements*, 171

## 23

### *The Holy Spirit Inspires David*

It is the Holy Spirit—ardent, luminous, and quickening by turns—which fills him and makes him aware of himself, of his filial position, of his weakness, of his discontent, of his state of sin, of his dangers, of his duty, and also of the unworthiness and inadequacy of everything around him. It is not without reason that he is called a man inspired. For through him the world inhales God, and through him God inhales the world and, if I may say so, continually renews His knowledge of it.<sup>1</sup>

*Accompagnements*, 142

<sup>1</sup> By reciting the Psalms composed by David at the dictation of the Holy Spirit.

**24***The Holy Spirit and St. Paul*

Sobbing in the flames, I embrace the Septenary Spirit! I am at the mercy of One who unsparingly demands all that is mortal in me that He may make it immortal, and all that is human in me that He may make it divine. From Damascus to Ephesus, from Thessalonica to Rome, I am like a flaming tower spreading the blaze. I am the fire! And what will I, but that it be kindled? There is nothing in this created world which is not capable and susceptible of fire. There is nothing in the world which is not capable of the iniquity of refusing me the fire which I must have—if not after the manner of the elect, then after the manner of the damned! I disseminate in all directions the burning seed, the spark and the coal, the vein and the wick of that fire which will utterly ravish me on the last day! Consume, consummate!

*Cantique, 356*

**25***The Seven Gifts*

Wisdom is that total and immediate apperception (including the sense of taste) which addresses itself directly to the divine essence. Understanding is discursive knowledge. Counsel is its practical application, and Force the ability to apply. Knowledge is the ability to discriminate between good and evil, yes and no, left and right, greater and lesser, and to penetrate accidents to their divine *raison d'être* for, in the words of the Psalmist, "*Mirabilis facta est scientia tua ex me.*" And finally the Fear of God is that which lies deeper than knowledge and which addresses itself directly to the divine presence; it is the shudder in the marrow of our bones and the roots of our nerves at the divine breath. The Messiah, the little Christ child, brings all these gifts in a single package, for

from the Fear of God to Wisdom all is one inseparable unity: seven gifts, but a single Spirit.

*Ev. Isaie*, 52

## 26

*Fear of the Lord* is at once a negative and a dynamic force, the reinforcement of an instinctive consent by a specific act of the will, a spontaneous outburst of loyalty to its Creator on the part of the creature, the resistance of our reason to the temptation of autonomy, the unhesitating choice of duty over its alternative.

*Piety* consists in a sympathetic, receptive, and observant attitude toward all those things around it which express the glory and the will of God.

*Knowledge* is the taste and appetite for truth.

*Fortitude* is that strengthening quality which obtains from us what it wants by instilling desire: a desire so strong, says the Canticle of Canticles, that it can stand up to death itself. But this patient, long-suffering Spirit can also be a violent Spirit when occasion demands, as our Lord reminded us, "the Kingdom of heaven has been enduring violent assault, and the violent have been seizing it by force." [Matt. 11:12] This is why on Pentecost He descended on the Apostles like a hurricane, like a gust of wind, and a flash of lightning; not just on their heads, but deep in their breasts, so as to make them appear like drunken men. [cf. Acts 2:1-13] This is the Spirit that knocked Saul to the ground on the road to Damascus and in a single flash illumined and gathered into one incandescent brand, tore apart and welded together, that dark and raging soul.

And on another road, that of Caesarea Philippi, Simon suddenly came forward and, hand raised to heaven and foot planted on the rock, swore before all the ages that Jesus is the Son of the living God. And Thomas on the eve of Calvary bravely exclaimed, "Let us also go that we may die with

Him!" [John 11:16] And when the Lord asked John and James if they could drink from His cup they replied without hesitating, "We can." "I can do all things," says the Apostle, "in Him who strengthens me." [Phil. 4:13] What a ring that has: all things! I can do all things! We can do all things!

*Counsel:* Is it not written of this gift that it is like "water far below the surface"? [Prov. 20:5] In other words, like a well, like a capital resource.

*Understanding* may be defined as an impassioned conversion of all the forms of the soul to that eye which it opens and that eager gaze which it directs toward God and His works. *Intelligentia enim est opus in visione* says Daniel, a man of passion. Knowledge, as we have seen, was a certain appetite for truth, a certain innocent and profound taste for that bread which is a way and which the Father of light never tires of offering to our lips. But Understanding is more than an appetite, it is a participation which is sustained by recognition. Just as Counsel may be compared to water and sap, so Understanding—acute, intense, subtile, luminous, irresistible, inexhaustible—may be compared to that form of breath which is fire—eloquent respiration. Indeed, it is in the form of a fiery tongue, that organ of taste and speech, that He descended on the heads of the Apostles.

*Wisdom:* And now behold the dread moment when I place my foot on the highest rung, and must attempt to articulate the idea of Wisdom, as if we had been discussing anything else all along. For Wisdom, as the Bible frequently states, is Understanding, and Counsel, and Fortitude, and Knowledge, and Piety, and above all, it is Fear of the Lord. But all these virtues are second to Wisdom, we are told in the Book of Wisdom; it was she who went before us unawares and showed the other virtues the way. [7:12] It is Wisdom who ushers into intimacy with God those who have been made worthy by the other disciplinary gifts. Wisdom precedes the light. [*Ibid.*, 7:29] "Indeed she reaches from end

to end mightily and governs all things well." [*Ibid.*, 8:1]<sup>2</sup>  
*Sophie*, 67-83

## 27

*The Gift of Tongues*

Among the most enigmatic passages in Scripture are those in First Corinthians and in the Book of Acts dealing with the gift of tongues. Formerly the Tower of Babel had marked the introduction of particularity and disorder in human communication. Come ye, the Holy Spirit had said to the other persons of the Trinity, "let us go down, and there confuse their language so that they will not understand one another's speech . . . For this reason it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the speech of all the earth." [Gen. 11:7-9]

And now at Pentecost the Holy Spirit descends from heaven once more. He does not just descend, He hurls Himself like a thunderbolt, He restores to the Church all these scattered tongues, *dispertitiae linguae*, to make of them a single flame. The tongue of old Zacharia is loosened and lo, he celebrates in all the dialects of the world *magnalia Dei*. "But they were all amazed and marveled, saying, Behold, are not all these that are speaking Galileans? And how have we heard each his own language in which he was born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites . . . Cretans and Arabians. . . . What does this mean?" But malicious minds who are not so easily impressed are quick to find the answer: "They are full of new wine!" [Acts 2:7-13]

*Ruth*, 93

<sup>2</sup> See the long passage (Wisdom, 7:22-24), to which Claudel refers further on: "For in her is a spirit intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, agile, clear, unstained, certain, not baneful, loving the good, keen, unhampered, beneficent . . . and she penetrates and pervades all things by reason of her purity."

## 28

This gift of tongues, intimately connected with that of prophecy, remained with the Church for some time, as is attested by the Book of Acts as well as the Epistles of St. Paul; it was a period of ferment. It is as if the Holy Spirit, which had for so many years confined its murmuring to a few chosen and consecrated individuals, and which had held its peace from Malachia to St. John the Baptist, now suddenly bursts forth and attacks mankind *en masse* in a sort of mad frenzy, speaking of God to God in all the languages of the world at once. "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!" says the Psalmist. [150:6]

All the obstacles—palate, tongue, lips, and teeth, and the use thereof—which are erected by all the nationalities of the world to prevent the free flight of man's soul, lo, they are all lifted at once, and the vowel triumphs over the consonant! "And He put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God!" [Psalms 39:4] All the noise of which the human spirit is capable is wrung from it by the Holy Spirit and the vast organ, filled with this rush of air, begins to swell and sing in every pipe. The entire human vocabulary comes into play, and all of human speech issues forth from every portal to meet the Word.

*Ruth, 94*

## 29

Once fermentation was introduced, the effervescence of the new wine bursts the old bottle. God spoke to Moses in Hebrew; behold, now He addresses strange races, each in its own tongue. This is the first characteristic of glossology, and the first symptom of that indwelling and possession of the soul by the Holy Spirit. For if a man speaks in a tongue which is unknown to him, it is a sure indication that someone else is speaking through his mouth.

*Ruth, 94*

# The Holy Catholic Church

*Le protestant vit seul, mais le catholique vit dans la communion de l'Eglise.*

*Soulier de satin*

THE Church is a society founded by Jesus Christ, composed of the baptized, and united in the declaration of a common faith and the bond of a mutual communion. All its members respect the authority of the Pope in Rome and of the bishops in communion with him, and their end is life everlasting.

The Church is by definition a thing of massive density, in which the divine is intimately related to the human, with the result that this society has a unique quality. Christ founded the Church when He said to Peter: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" [Matt. 16:18], thus indicating that He meant it to be an

hierarchical society, under the guidance of a leader.

The Church is called militant when we are speaking of the faithful living on this earth; suffering, when we are speaking of those who, having departed this world, have still to atone for their sins; and triumphant, when we are speaking of those who, by their merits or their atonement, have finally and forever attained the heavenly kingdom.

The Church possesses three qualities: It is *visible*, i.e., made up of bodies and souls. It is *infallible*, because it is guided by the Holy Spirit. It is *indefectible*, because it will endure until the end of time and into eternity, as Christ Himself promised: "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

There are four marks of the Church: It is *one*. It has only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, according to St. Paul. Its founder, the Son of God, is its head, and the Church is His Mystical Body. He has transmitted His authority to Peter and to all his successors, who speak and act in His name. It is informed by a single spirit, the Holy Spirit, and it is united in a single hope and a single charity.

It is *holy*, because its end, its sacraments, and its Founder, as well as its chosen ones, are holy.

It is *catholic*, because it is destined to embrace the entire world, without distinction of race or

tongue, an end which is already realized in part. "All have been grounded and established on the cornerstone Jesus Christ." [Eph. 2:20]

It is *apostolic*, because it was built up by the Apostles of Jesus Christ, whose successors transmit His doctrines and sacraments to us. From the time of St. Peter this hierarchical society has suffered no interruption.

Only the Roman Catholic Church possesses these peculiar qualities and attributes; it alone is the true Church of Christ.

What is Paul Claudel's position with regard to the Church? Let us state at once that it would be difficult to find a Christian writer with a more deep-rooted sense of his membership in the Church. So profoundly has he felt the power, the love, and the divine majesty of that great family which opened its arms to him on Christmas day at Notre Dame that since then his filial love has never failed.

"Love of God, total submission to the Church, this is all I have ever tried to say," he wrote resolutely to Jacques Rivière. (*Toi*, 30) She was that "honored Mother" whom he encountered throughout his travels across continents: whether in Boston, Tokyo, or Rio de Janeiro he was delighted to find her at every port of call, now in her splendor, in the form of a magnificent cathedral, now in humble guise, in some little village lane.

"It was then that I realized the value of this mother of the earth's four corners, who had brought me into the world, and who would not let me go. . . . Everywhere I went I found a Catholic church opening its arms to receive me." Even the poorest chapel was for him "the golden mansion, the gate of heaven, the Ark of the Covenant." (*J'aime*, 110)

He knows the struggles and the suffering of this Mother Church, and he has shared them with the tender heart of a son. "Among the promises which God made her, there is not one which has been more constantly and visibly kept than that of persecution. Not for an instant has she been permitted to be at peace or to leave the world in peace." (*Discours*, 16) We must, therefore, place all our energies at her service and dedicate ourselves to her. "For two thousand years the Catholic Church has been in the position of a besieged city, and to defend her is not a task for children," he tells us, not without indignation. (*Contacts*, 246)

"Not . . . to leave the world in peace," says Claudel. Is the Church warlike by nature? Let us remember that her Founder said, "I have come to bring a sword, not peace." How, then, could His Church be a house of repose, a refuge from the cares of the world? God forbid that she ever become one! Bearer of truth in a world corrupted by lies, must not

her very appearance create a scandal?

Again, "You are the salt of the earth," Jesus told His Apostles, "but if the salt loses its strength, what shall it be salted with?" It is necessary that the evangelical salt retain all its savor, all its bite.

"Know, Church of God, that your business is to fight," writes Claudel. "Know, Truth, that you did not come into the world with impunity, know that you are a perpetual threat." (*Isaïe*, 81) Let us not forget that the confirmed Christian is a soldier of Christ, and if necessary he must give his life to defend Him.

This Church, which can have no traffic with evil or error, is above all a mother full of compassion for her children. How rapturously Claudel has celebrated her bounty! What concern for the little ones, for those who labor! "She invites all this confused and suffering multitude to her wedding feast, to that table which she keeps eternally prepared. You were the slaves of money," she says, "but I will make you the servants of music." (*Discours*, 25) That is, the flesh has enslaved you, but my Spirit will set you free, and teach you to sing in the regained liberty of the children of God.

The Church is the sole dispenser of divine life by means of the sacraments. "The water has given us birth, the oil has permeated

and strengthened us, the blood has purified us, the bread has sustained us, and the wine has illuminated us.”<sup>1</sup> (*Cantique*, 159)

In the center of this Church there is a queen, an immaculate creature who unites it. “Just as the physical heart unites the body, so the heart of Mary, linked with that in our own breast, strives for the unity of the Church in a single collective Christ.” (*Accompagnements*, 125) At its head there is a visible leader, the Pope, “clothed with the whole world,” who identifies himself daily with “the needs, the sufferings, the necessities, and even with the sins” of the whole Church. (*Ibid.*, 164) He is more than a leader, he is a father whom “we can question, and who answers us with lumi-

nous lips . . . a father who is ever at the service of his children . . . who inhales the Holy Spirit with his own lips that he may impart it to us.” (*Ibid.*, 161) The poet has understood not only the grandeur but the devotion of this father; what touching, what filial respect he has for him!

And we, like Claudel, must count ourselves fortunate to belong to this divine society, “which has more spirit than we have,” because it is under the guidance of God and cannot fail.

The Church is a living person, the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, “anything but the abstract definition of a collective reality. It has a life, a mind, an activity, a face, a personality . . . and above all this a name, and above this name, a crown.” (*Poète*, 98)

## 1

### *Foreshadowed in the Old Testament by the Synagogue*

Shadow and chrysalis of the future Church.

*Cantique*, 36

## 2

### *Her Foundation*

That which does not pass away is my foundation and my throne, says the Church.

*Cantique*, 56

<sup>1</sup> Reference to Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, and the Eucharist.

**3***Her Authority*

The Church is an enduring voice.

*Cantique*, 139

**4***Society*

The Church is anything but the abstract definition of a collective reality. It has a life, a mind, an activity, a face, a personality, a head, an intelligence above and beyond instinct with regard to a clearly perceived end, a power of judgment with regard to inward and outward decorum which is infinitely vigilant, patient, and subtle, a sure ability to eliminate any extraneous and harmful elements, a common vocation served by an organization which is infinitely complex and precise, a government and an administration of her own, and above all this a name, and above this name, a crown.

*Poète*, 98

**5***Her Wealth*

The Church . . . that vast treasury of joy and beauty!

*Corr. Suarès*, 126

**6***Mother of Immortality*

The Church, this mother of immortality, born always to breathe new life, to drink at the source to the limit of her

internal capacity, with flared nostrils gazes toward the rising Sun.<sup>2</sup>

*Cantique*, 380

## 7

### *Basilica: House of the King*

The Church is a basilica, that is, the residence of a Sovereign in the heart of His court.

*Positions II*, 190

## 8

### *The Christian's Good Fortune*

A great wonder has befallen me, for I have come to know the living God, the personal God promised to future generations by the Blessed Virgin in her *Magnificat*. And yet another wonder, which all those years of storm and confusion were perhaps necessary for me to appreciate: in a world which is falling apart I have felt once more beneath my feet, triumphant and unsinkable, that vessel which is called the Catholic Church and which bears on its mainmast the standard of the crucified Christ.

*Discours*, 84

## 9

### *Unity*

This unity which I have taught you through love, that you may be One, as my Father and I are One in the unity of substance and the separation of persons, this unity I leave in your hands to realize through your own will and ingenuity. Let brother come to the aid of brother, and the hammer to the aid of the fire. And when these have done their work, it will be

<sup>2</sup> Christ.

the turn of the nail, the bolt, and the screw. "Well done," you will say then, "it holds."

*Ev. Isaie, 126*

## 10

We have at our command not only our own resources for loving, understanding, and serving God, but everything from the Blessed Virgin in the highest heaven down to this miserable African leper who, bell in hand, opens a half-wasted mouth to utter the responses of the Mass. All creation, visible and invisible, all history, past, present, and future, all nature, all the wealth of the saints compounded by grace, all this is at our command, all this is our extended self and our wondrous equipment. All the saints, all the Angels, are ours. We can avail ourselves of the mind of St. Thomas, the arm of St. Michael, and the heart of St. Joan or St. Catherine of Siena, and of all the hidden resources which spring into effervescent life at our touch.

All that goodness, majesty, and beauty have wrought from one end of the earth to the other, everything that radiates sanctity—like a patient that runs a fever—is as though wrought by us. The heroism of missionaries, the inspiration of doctors, the generosity of martyrs, the genius of artists, the burning prayers of Poor Clares and Carmelites, it is as though they belonged to us, and they do belong to us. From North to South, from Alpha to Omega, from East to West, we are a part of it all. We wear it like a garment, we set it all in motion in an orchestral performance in which we are at once revealed and undone.

All that is within us, almost without our awareness, the Church boldly translates and bodies forth in the world on a magnificent scale.

Such is this mother by whom, through Baptism, we have received a second birth.

*Poète, 100*

**11**

In short, the Catholic religion must be substantiated by means of a Catholic demonstration, that is, a total one, and by means of this very totality. The Catholic religion is true because it is catholic, that is, all-embracing; it is the keystone and coping of all. It triumphs only by answering all partial criticism with its indivisible mass.

*Positions II*, 73

**12**

*The Three Faces of a Single Church*

Militant, suffering, triumphant, she is not three Churches, but one, all of a piece, indivisible and enduring in the eye of God. The first merits, the second atones, the third enjoys. It must not be imagined that each member of these three divisions enjoys, atones, or earns solely on his own account. He enjoys, he atones, he merits also as a member of the group to which he belongs, and in which he has been assigned a role.

*Cantique*, 364

**13**

*Sanctity*

The Church is hungry for God. She is hungry for realization. She desires God's will and purpose. She hungers to draw from Him the life and being of these millions of souls to whom she is continually giving birth, to convert eternity into time, to exploit the inexhaustible resource, to bring each thing to completion, to equal the capacity of the abyss. What does she not gather from God? All kinds of saints, one after the other, all kinds of events and ideas. And, above all, she craves all kinds of sacrifices. This is what she perpetually de-

sires, without realizing it—all forms of enlightenment, that she may turn them into music! For, O my beloved, says God to His Bride, can He who placed that ear deep within you ever tire of listening to *you*?

*Accompagnements*, 144

## 14

### *The Sacraments*

The Christian is the result of the sacraments, and he carries their emanations with him, but it is the Church who is their agent: *Opus pigmentarii*. . . . The water has given us birth, the oil has permeated and strengthened us, the blood has purified us, the bread has sustained us, the wine has illuminated us, Holy Orders and Marriage have crept into the very marrow of our bones.

*Cantique*, 159

## 15

### *Sanctity of the Members*

Closer yet to Jesus than those who share His glory are those who have been permitted to share His affliction. Choicer than the unblemished fruit is that, bruised and broken, from which spurts a precious juice! Of the Curé of Ars, spent, burned, and broken by confession, or Father Damien, devoured by leprosy—who will dare say that “there was neither beauty nor elegance in him”? Never could the creature emerging fresh and whole from the bosom of his Creator have dazzled the Angels with an explosion of light such as theirs!

And what of St. Francis staggering down Mount Alverno on his wounded feet, what of this living crucifix, for whom all use of his stigmatized hands was agony, what of this half torn and broken form from which an angel emerges, who seems almost a perfect likeness? There are such souls, Lord; along with the rest of us, look at them so that you may

recognize them. It is such as these, Lord, that You have chosen for Your friends!

*Cantique, 242*

## 16

### *Catholicity*

Nothing short of the very circumference of the earth can stop the Church in her work of catholicity. She alone knows what can truly be called progress. "Who is this who comes forward like the rising dawn?" Truth lights her path, history precedes her, even error makes way for her. The world has been delivered to her, that she may take it, not by force, but by love.

*Cantique, 249*

## 17

The union of Christ and the soul, of Christ and the Church, is compared to marriage. We must offer him a chaste bride, for what alliance could there be between Christ and Belial? Sanctified by the word, purified by the water, "without blemish or wrinkle but holy and blameless." God asks the soul, He asks the Church, simply to come before Him, to be revealed to Him in a spirit of complete faith, without guilt or shame, and straightway He supplies all deficiencies. By means of a universal perfection He completes any individual imperfection. The Church is beautiful because it is whole, that is, catholic throughout her body.

*Cantique, 150*

## 18

I understand the word Catholic in the universal sense: someone who has truly risen above the world and who no

longer sees in it anything which is not of Christ, even in contradiction, even in evil and sin.

*J'aime*, 115

## 19

My solitude was augmented by the loneliness of exile. It was then I realized the value of this mother of the earth's four corners, who had brought me into the world, and who would not let me go. Everywhere I went I found a Catholic church opening its arms to receive me. It was no longer the glorious vaults of Notre Dame in Paris; it was some wretched hut in a missionary settlement, some humble refuge for poor people at the end of a side street in Boston or Hamburg. In their shabby and self-conscious humility, they became for me the golden mansion of the litany which our prayer books translate as "sanctuary of charity," the gate of heaven, the Ark of the Covenant over which shone the morning star, the very star which the priest was about to place in my mouth.

*J'aime*, 110

## 20

How can I explain that without the Church I cannot fully be myself, I cannot fully realize myself, I cannot fully be the creature God loves? Just as the body of Christ exists whole in every portion of the host, so the whole Church is behind the individual countenance of every Christian, and expresses itself through his voice, and hears itself called *perfecta mea*. It is the whole Church which has undertaken a given assignment in each one of us, for the good of the whole; it is the Church as a whole, *tota pulchra es* (the Bride is beautiful only because she is complete), which is the object of the Spouse's desire, and it is with the favors of the whole Church, from which nothing in time or space is absent, that each of us is called upon to overwhelm Him.

At the moment of the Annunciation, Mary had already become the whole Church. A single soul, a single eye, may mirror the whole image of God. "With one glance of your eyes, with one bead of your necklace," says the Bridegroom of the Canticle. There are many souls, he continues, but only one is "my dove, my perfect one."

*Emmaüs*, 141

## 21

### *Missionary*

(Commentary on the verse of the Canticle of Canticles: "Do not arouse, do not stir up love before its own time.")

What are we to understand by the sleep of the soul, the sleep of the Church? It is a state in which the passive triumphs over the active, or rather passive activity over aggressive activity, wisdom over will, the spirit of delight over the spirit of pursuit. "Do not stir up love before its own time," until a sure voice swelling deep within her has taken the form of an urgent summons. It is then that St. Louis embarks on the crusade, and Maria Theresa Noblet sets out for Papua, and Maria of the Incarnation for Canada. It is then that St. Thérèse sets forth to sow Spain with castles; it is then that a son of Francis seizes the shield of Austria and the sword of Sobieski!

But what of those moments when the Church, her eye fastened on the stream of appearances, her doctrinal harp hanging from a barren willow, no longer feels quivering on her shoulders the wings of the great Eagle? And when, in the depths of boredom and lethargy and worldliness, she recognizes that unforgettable voice: "Peter, dost thou love me?" she rises, she knows, she speaks as herself: Yes, Lord, I am here and I love you! I know that voice, for it is the one that gladdened my youth!

*Cantique*, 64

**22***Her Passion for the Universe*

Ah, Catholic Church, how utterly I share with you in my own way your passion for the universe!

*Ev. Isaïe*, 290

**23***Her Christlike Hunger for Souls*

This thirst for action, this compassion which has become a passion in the hearts of so many noble women, educators, and missionaries, this need for order, meaning, purity and response all around us, this way of intimately embracing the sinner in order to transform him, this craving for understanding and enlightenment which torments the bowels of so many students, all this is related to that hunger on the part of the Saviour which He communicated to His Church: "Where is my guest chamber, that I may eat the passover there with my disciples?" [Mark 14:14]

*Poète*, 120

**24**

All that the Church does, we do with her. With her help we are enabled, within the limits of our humble powers, to take the world in our hands and offer it to God—and even to take God Himself in our hands and offer Him to the world.

*Emmaüs*, 145

**25***The Vast Territory of the Church*

All the earth is called on to provide the foundation, all mankind is called on to provide the material for this living

tower, this Tower of David built to reconcile heaven and earth, which is the Catholic Church. O my beautiful one, says the Bridegroom, come, "let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet!"

*Emmaüs*, 53

## 26

The Catholic Church does not confine herself to the realm of the spirit; she has pitched her tent, to speak the language of Isaia, on the very frontier of Creation. Nothing that is the work of God is alien to her. Nothing that contributes to the glory of God and the welfare of man is outside her understanding or beyond her jurisdiction. The universe is her responsibility, and it is she who must guide our weekday labors to their Sunday rest.

*Accompagnements*, 153

## 27

### *The Catholic Way*

The silent voice which spoke to me on Christmas day has now become audible, and to respond to it there is within me a congregation that cries out in all the languages of the earth. For is it not written that every living man is a temple? Yes, my God, and when You speak, someone is listening who feels that he himself is a whole church! Someone who all alone, O my God, is capable of an ecumenical roar!

*Ev. Isaïe*, 206

## 28

The Catholic is at home in the whole universe, he is the nucleus of a certain circle which accompanies him wherever he goes. He is a center of composition. The non-believer, by whatever name he is called, carries with him the curse of

isolation. He is parallel to everything. Is there anything more hopelessly lonely than the parallel position?

*Cantique*, 283

## 29

### *Isolation Outside the Church*

A man who is outside the Church soon becomes isolated. He has no longer any landmarks and he does not know where he is going. He suffers from the terrible curse of no longer being able to help anyone. All ties are broken, save those which hold him fast.

*Positions II*, 138

## 30

### *Apostolicity*

“Who will bring me into the fortified city?” asks the Psalmist. [59:11] Through the iron curtain and into the heart of the pagan wilderness: who will bring you, Lord? This is the task which You reserve for Your Catholic and Apostolic Church, for that woman pictured by St. John, crying out in the sun. [Apoc. 12:1–2] We see St. Peter, the first Pope, in the house of the pagan Cornelius; he is told to “arise,” that is, to broaden his horizon, and he is presented, by an angel, with a sheet which contains all the animals of creation. “Kill and eat,” says the heavenly messenger, thus putting an end to the legal distinction between clean and unclean animals.

But another meaning may be discerned: the animals stand for the various races of men, and the Head of the Church is ordered to assimilate them, after having destroyed in the baptismal water whatever in them invited destruction. Indeed, everything capable of contributing to the Body of Christ is food for the Church.

All those artificial barriers which His enemy works incessantly to raise: class, caste, and iron curtain, racial preju-

dice, chauvinistic nationalism, are dissipated by the luminous breath of the Church. Is it possible not to share, at this spectacle, the prophetic rapture which fills the last chapters of Isaia: "Rise up in splendor! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you." [60:1]

*J'aime*, 35

## 31

### *The Pope, Successor to the Apostles*

We are not like the unhappy Protestants; we have a father whom we may question and who answers us with luminous lips. Everything he tells us is true, and we come away calm and reassured. A father! And not just one father, but a fountain of fathers, an inexhaustible source of priests and sacraments, enough for all the world!

When we have children, a father is standing by to take them in his arms, to cleanse them with water and season them with salt. When we are hungry, someone is there to place the host in our mouths. When we marry and when we say yes to one another, someone is there to hear us. When we have done something wrong, someone is there to scold us and to make a little cross on our foreheads. And when we are ready to die, someone is there to loosen all those cruel bonds which would detain us. Go freely, Christian soul! Go, my child, do not be afraid; Run along, my child, run along, my little child!

And all this is the Pope, the Pope serving us in God's name, part of our very life and breath! Or rather it is Jesus Christ, Son of God, in the person of the Pope, acting for His Father "even until now," [John 5:17] as it is written. Let us heed Him who tells us in deep humility, "I did not come to be served, but to serve." All that I ask is to be allowed to work in your service.

Should we not rejoice to have such a father, a father who is ever at the service of his children? The ancient He-

brews had the mercy seat which the High Priest consulted from time to time. But we have a priest, set over this vast tonsured flock and ordained by the breath of His mouth, a priest who inhales the Holy Spirit with his own lips that he may impart it to us.

*Accompagnements*, 161

### 32

Once I saw a young priest weeping all alone, weeping his heart out in his deserted church. But what of the vicar of Jesus Christ, the Pastor of the universe: must not he too sometimes weep, shed tears of blood, dash his forehead against the sacred steps of the ecumenical altar? The world is so wicked, and above all, so deaf! So horribly heedless, so stupid, so appallingly deaf!

That red lamp burning before the tabernacle is the Pope—Jesus Christ in the Pope, alone under the eye of God, watching, listening, looking, understanding, working, and praying.

*Accompagnements*, 163

### 33

It is glorious to see the whole earth shaken to its foundations, moving toward this white figure which stands on the immovable rock and, with its two arms outstretched over the human multitude, seems at once to be calling them, holding them, blessing them, and in the image of the Psalmist, hushing them like the conductor of an orchestra. Before our eyes is gradually emerging for the first time since the Roman Empire a united Europe, born out of common consent and necessity. This unity which is imposed on our selfish concerns under pain of death, can we refrain from hoping that in a future perhaps less distant than we think it may be extended to our souls?

*J'aime*, 38

## 34

There is a man who stands alone but of whom it may be said, with even greater justice than of the High Priest of the Ancient Law, that he is clothed with the whole world. As for us humble believers, the sphere of our orisons does not extend very far; we pray for our "near and dear," a handful of more or less dimly illumined figures. It is only on Good Friday that we are officially invited to pray for the whole Church. But for the Pope, every day is Good Friday.

Every day he identifies himself with the needs, the sufferings, the necessities, and even with the sins of the whole world. He is conscious every moment of this Church of which he is the concrete embodiment. At every moment he presents to God the universe upon which he is crucified. The whole universe is not too wide to help him explain to God what each of us tries to stammer on our own.

*Accompagnements*, 164

## 35

*The Struggles of the Church*

For two thousand years the Catholic church has been in the position of a besieged city, and to defend her is not a task for children.

*Contacts*, 246

## 36

*Besieged Citadel*

Well, this position, that of a besieged citadel—or rather of an "emporium" overflowing with riches of which their owners are unaware but which the poverty of the surrounding universe has scented from afar and comes from all direc-

tions to claim in a suppliant and menacing tide—this position has been the Catholic church's from its foundation.

Often she tries to close her doors, to stop her ears. "Leave me alone," says the materfamilias, "I am resting, I am with my children, they are my responsibility!" But she is not left alone; there are the heresies, the persecutions, the invasions, the internal convulsions, there are the plagues of all varieties, physical and spiritual, there is the endless succession of fanatics who never tire of pounding on her door—those who demand life and those, pursued by a no less stern necessity, who demand death. There is a whole troubled sea of wickedness which harasses the bark of St. Peter.

*Ev. Isaïe*, 309

### 37

Among the promises which God made the Church, there is not one which has been more constantly and visibly kept than that of persecution. Not for an instant has she been permitted to be at peace, or to leave the world in peace, or be free from the burden of an unbearable treasure which must be defended and shared.

*Discours*, 16

### 38

#### *The Church Persecuted from Birth (The Flight into Egypt)*

Why this retreat of Mary and her child, this tender, lactescent Church, into the deepest night of paganism?

*Epée*, 25

### 39

#### *The Church and the Reformation*

(The symbolism of the colored stained glass windows being replaced by transparent ones.)

In a flash all is extinguished! From the assaults of heresy the Church has defended herself with light. . . . It is no longer the time for her to divide and color it. Let it stream in, pure white, flooding this sanctuary of formal dogma illumined by apologetics and glossed by eloquence. The Church is no longer a sublimation of the city of God, she has become a specialized instrument of salvation, a machine for seizing souls.

*Vitraux des cathédrales de France*

## 40

### *The Church in Perpetual Exodus*

St. John depicts her with the wings of the great Eagle on her shoulders, fleeing to Egypt in order to escape the river Time, the temporal monster, in this place where time no longer exists. Her whole history is one long migration, a migration across kingdoms, through short-lived civilizations which vainly attempt to detain her, to force her into servitude. The plagues of Egypt are merely the symbolic representation of the evils resulting from this insane desire.

*Emmaüs*, 89

## 41

Ah! How fortunate we are today to be Christians, to be able to say to ourselves that in spite of all our faults we belong to the Church, that we have never stopped proclaiming her before men and trying to restore to this injured mother the affection and respect denied her by so many ungrateful children.

*Corr. Suarès*, 172

## 42

### *The Church and Her Struggles Throughout History*

After that desperate dialogue between East and West,<sup>3</sup> after that mitred and tonsured mob has torn itself apart, out of the profound confusion of the Scriptures, there emerges, after a long digestive process, the bloodstained articles of the Credo and the unbreakable design of anathemas. In the center of all, eternal, patient, and powerful, Rome weighs, measures, and prevails. All that is not of her breaks away, withers, and dies.

*Ruth*, 108

## 43

### *The Vitality of the Church*

For two hundred years we have been saturated *ad nauseam* with a learned theory to the effect that Christianity is an oriental religion in the manner of Buddhism and Mohammedanism, a doctrine of resignation, fatalism, and death. It is a pity that, on the contrary, the history of the Church from its origin up to our own time presents the spectacle of an intense energy, a spirit of universal enterprise, a spiritual, moral, and physical activity against evil and error which has never seen a decline, and which ceases only in those areas where schism and heresy have extended their deadly influence.

Our great minds answer this with clichés about the western “temperament” or European “pragmatism” which has miraculously managed to reverse the negative doctrines of the East like a rabbit’s skin, and change black to white, etc. etc. It is Europe, it would appear, which, by virtue of some mysterious force analogous to Molière’s *virtus dormitiva*,<sup>4</sup> has cre-

<sup>3</sup> A reference to the rivalry between the Eastern and Western Empires.

<sup>4</sup> Soporific value.

ated Christianity. As for me, I believe that it is Christianity which has created Europe.

*Positions II*, 180

## 44

The Catholic Church was not founded merely to restore the world's dignity, to reinstate it in its joyous and intelligent role of paradise by making it the anteroom and stepping stone to something infinitely greater. From the first day the Church was ordered by her divine Master to *cultivate* this paradise. After His Resurrection, did not He Himself appear to Magdalen as a gardener? And does not the Gospel state, "My Father works even until now, and I work."

Through what misunderstanding, what aberration, have we come to believe, and through what obsession has an ignorant public been convinced that religion is a sort of opium whose sole virtue consists in what Molière calls its soporific value? It is true enough that in the Canticle of Canticles the Church is made to say, through the mouth of the Sulamite, that she is seeking repose; but she knows that this repose exists only in conformity with the will of God. She does not put her trust in any utopia, in any millennium. She knows that until the last day, until the end of the world, she will suffer. She knows that she can expect nothing but travail, anguish, strife, and childbirth.

Is it not she and she alone who, by fixing forever out of our reach the heavenly ideal to which we must conform and which demands our collaboration, has cured us forever of complacency and satisfaction? Is it not she who, by establishing order and unity not through an accumulation and rearrangement of effects, but under the high inspiration of the divine Cause, has created in the world a universal ordination of charity which no element, however minute, may escape? Indeed, does not St. Augustine tell us that the cornerstone of the Christian city is not below but above? For under the

watchful eye of this universal mother, nothing is lost or wasted, no penny may rust in the mud; everything that is God's handiwork is infinitely precious to her and worthy of all respect.

*Discours, 44*

## 45

### *The Church Militant*

Know, Church of God, that whether you will or no, your business is to fight. These enemies who come at you from out of nowhere and have mobilized all their forces to destroy you, understand that they are not to blame, they had no alternative, it is you who are the aggressor. They had no choice but to defend themselves! Know, Truth, that you did not come into this world with impunity; you constitute a perpetual and terrible threat to error and all its attendant interests, a threat which settles for nothing short of utter annihilation. Experience has shown you to be invincible, so do not wonder if they try to drive you back through every exit, through every opening, to your very doors, those doors against which it has been promised that the gates of hell shall not prevail.

*Isaie, 82*

## 46

### *Her Generosity*

Let us hearken to this Church within us, of us, which is in the act of giving birth to something everlasting.

*Apocalypse, 248*

## 47

The Catholic Church as she is and as God sees her is something other than this feeble and anxious flock exemplified by that squad of ancient females who attend Mass in the

obscurity of a Parisian crypt. It is a dynamically functioning, triple-barreled engine which transforms eternity into time, and time back into eternity.

*Cantique*, 363

## 48

"I did not come to be served, but to serve." And the Church herself with all her sacraments, how eagerly and diligently she places herself at our service! To what height does she not lead us that, catholic like her, we may command a view of all the kingdoms of the earth. Whatever is mine, she says, is yours.

*Rose*, 129

## 49

### *Liberating Role*

"Come to me," says the Saviour, "all you who labor and are burdened; and I will give you rest." [Matt. 11:28] And the Church too, like her prototype Wisdom of the sacred text, goes forth to every highway and byway and invites all the confused and suffering multitude to her wedding feast, to the table which she keeps eternally prepared. You were the slaves of money, she says, but I will make you the servants of music. You, who in paradise were given the ancient order to work the land, shall no longer work it as hirelings, in ignorance and slavery, but as rulers, in freedom, understanding, knowledge, and responsibility.

*Discours*, 25

## 50

### *Nurturing Role*

"Unless a man be born again," says the Saviour, "he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." [John 3:5] But, mar-

vels Nicodemus, can I re-enter the womb to be born again? Of course, doubter, the only alternative is to re-enter the Church that you may receive form and sustenance, and imbibe her clear-eyed ability to endure.

*Emmaüs*, 63

## 51

### *Bearer of Truth*

"And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my new name." [Apoc. 3:12] This is the voice of the Church, and it explains the definition of the councils and the instruction contained in the encyclicals distributed by the infallible Pope. For anything that is written down requires precise formulation and, in the process, even clarifies the opposing thesis. This is why a definition is often given in the form of a denunciation or of an introduction to a catalogue of errors. The name of God, the name of the Catholic Church thus legibly inscribed as on granite for all to see, is there in opposition to anything which, because of its exclusively secularist origin, contradicts the whole idea of God and the Church. Error is thus compelled to come forward and reveal itself in the attitude of total and fundamental denial.

*Apocalypse*, 348

## 52

There is one question that is continually being asked of the Catholic Church. Not only is it audibly asked by her children and her enemies, by charity and by persecution, but it is silently posed by the solemn and terrible spectacle of misery, crime, sin, and despair surrounding her in the universe. Is she not the heiress and the authorized agent of Him who said, "I have come into the world, to bear witness to the

truth" [John 18:37], and again, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" [John 14:6], and finally, "and the truth shall make you free." [John 8:32]

It is the whole universe in the fullness, consciousness, and agony of its need and its necessity which interrogates the Church and asks her, "What is Truth?"

*Discours, 27*

## 53

### *Her Wealth*

O Holy Church, it is this gathering of your own fruits, this deliberation on the sacred presence within you of your beloved burden, which accounts for your external beauty. For in the words of Job, "My root is spread out to the waters: the dew rests by right on my branches." [29:19] "Open up the gates to let in a nation that is just." [Isaia 26:2]

Enter, O blessed guest, and learn that my gates are closed only enough to prevent your escaping!

*Apocalypse, 308*

## 54

God has looked upon this creature consisting of a head and a body, at once temporal and eternal, who provided what He needed to establish His residence and who permitted the Creator to enjoy an intimate union with His Creature. It is for her and through her, the Church, that all has been accomplished. It is with her help that "he made from the skies above" [Prov. 8:28] that heaven whose keys He entrusted to her along with the power to lock and unlock. It is she who provides Him with a contact, as it were, a point of support, a duality justified by love, a strength in disparity, a base, an abyss deep enough to absorb this sublimity. It is she who orders all His wealth and who has been appointed its dispenser; she has it all stored away in her cupboard.

"When he set for the sea its limit" [Prov. 8:29]: these are the dogmas, the canons, the theological definitions, the disciplinary and moral prescriptions.

*Poète*, 102

## 55

### *The Wealth of the Christian*

What have I done to deserve this incomparable privilege of being a Christian and a Catholic? How is it possible for men to have a miracle like the Christian faith, like the Catholic church, right under their noses, and act as if they did not know it was there, as if it did not exist?

There is light, there is love, there is certitude, there is the matchless beauty of this world, and of our fellow men, and the even greater beauty of the one promised to us; there is God, there is the Blessed Virgin, there is this heart, this power to revive us which the priest asks only to place each morning in our mouths, if we will—and to all this the world prefers what? Not just pleasure, but anxiety, despair, degradation! There are even people today who are insane enough to tell you that they prefer anxiety, despair, degradation for its own sake!

*Discours*, 35

## 56

### *The Construction of the Church*

*In caverna maceriae!*<sup>5</sup> In the hollow places of the wall, in the depths of the masonry!

There are many walls, there is much masonry. There is the Church herself which the hymn of All Saints' Day tells us is made of living rock. There is also the masonry of theol-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Canticle of Canticles, 2:14: "O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret recesses of the cliff, let me see you, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and you are lovely."

ogy, made of the blocks of faith and the industry of the mind, ordered by the most austere and exquisite geometry, offering a base for the giddiest calculations of metaphysics.

*Cantique, 74*

## 57

### *Work and Testimony of the Church*

“Let me see you,” continues the Spouse. This is the request which the long succession of councils and dogmatic definitions has sought to fill, this is the whole direction of thought and history for two thousand years: this face is the image and reflection of Mine. “Let me hear your voice”—the voice of Gregory and Palestrina and Bossuet! “For your voice is sweet”—yes, even the harsh cry of these Chinese orphans, “and you are lovely”—yes, even the terrible face of Father Damien after he had contracted leprosy! For “a joyful heart gladdens the countenance.”

*Cantique, 75*

## 58

### *Power of Consecration*

(On Our Lord’s words at the marriage at Cana: “What wouldst thou have me do, woman?”)

Ah, Mary, you will know how to answer Me. For it is this mouth clinging to yours which will teach you the words of the consecration, these almighty words, “This is my body! This is my blood!” which have the power to change the very substance of things. Thus you and I may be as one, and your words become My words.

And now it is no longer the attendants of Cana but we ourselves who, as we look towards the eyes and mouth of Mary and the Church, receive her admonition to “do whatever he tells you.” Blessed are those of us who, less frivolous than the young man in the Gospel, lend an attentive ear. For

when we have been filled to the limit of the capacity of our five senses, the water of Baptism will be transformed in us into the wine of the spirit.

*Rose*, 137

## 59

### *Christ, the Strength of the Church*

The great commandment of Deuteronomy, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength," is not addressed merely to the artist, the engineer, the scholar, the priest, or the saint. It includes this little girl at catechism, this cripple on her sick-bed who, in the eyes of the Angels, has the strength of an army in battle formation. And naturally I hail, with an esteem not unmixed with irony, those magnificent examples of bodily perfection and human animality turned out by modern physical education, and whose petrified models the museums are there to preserve and offer to the admiring eyes of successive generations. But all the same, the true athlete, the man who has succeeded in making perfect use of that strength beyond his own strength, which is exacted by an unsparing lawmaker, is not Carpentier or Jack Dempsey, it is St. Francis of Assisi on that cross which his outstretched hands wrench from his wounded feet.

But above and beyond the image is the dazzling reality! There is that extraordinary hero suspended between heaven and earth whom humanity has gaped at, open-mouthed, for two thousand years, that Man-God forever forced beyond Himself, as it were, pulled, torn, unfurled in the unprecedented strain of a sort of bodily clamor. And indeed, it is the last cry, the cry of Jesus on the cross which never stops ringing in our ears, and even today makes us tremble to the very marrow of our bones, that "lion's roar" of which St. John speaks in the Apocalypse, by which all the false gods of the earth are reduced to silence. It is a cry of

supplication but also a cry of victory, a cry of defiance, whose echo we men and women of the Christian faith are here to receive and spread abroad.

*Discours, 46*

## 60

It is not only with all our strength, but with the strength of the whole Church, past and present, of all that, preceding us, still needs us to exist, that we embrace Christ, and that we try to understand and carry out His will.

*Poète, 251*

## 61

### *Diversity of Roles in the Church*

There has always been a Church that sees and a Church that listens, a Church of shepherds and a Church of sheep (of "men and mules" as the Psalmist says), a Church whose desire constitutes obedience and a Church whose eyes are the instant servants of her mouth. There have always been Martha and Mary, one prolific, the other profound.

*Poète, 283*

## 62

### *I Must Become the Church*

When God demands "all" my soul, He is actually ordering this of the whole Church, for it is only within this Church of which I am both the end result and the co-worker, that I will be able to obey. Only through the Church am I able to understand this need which God has of me. Only through the Church have I been desired from the dawn of time!

It is no small matter to have been the object of an infinite love; now I must do something in return. I must have something to give other than my own individuality; I must become the Church! I must realize my soul.

Something deep within me gradually rouses at the sound of these words, each of which has the power to uproot me and to give me life.

*Emmaüs, 141*

## 63

### *The Church of Stone, Image of the Church of the Spirit*

Chartres, before all others, is the church of Our Lady. How amply, how generously, her choir lies open to our eyes! She is overshadowed by the power of the Most High, she is humility exalted, she is sorrow crowned by glory! She is fragrance and unity, she is a gathering of balm. Honored vessel, reservoir of orthodoxy, secret spring of the spirit, well of wisdom, noble sanctuary of devotion! Full of grace, she may be seen from all directions completing the poor and ancient town; she seems to draw strength from it with her roots, she seems to settle into it with her mortises. She shares and transcends the rhythm of its rooftops, and, with her twin spires establishing the span of the city, she does not disappoint the ecstatic eye which asks to be transported to heaven.

*Art poétique, 218*

## 64

“Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one!”

I think of that formidable choir of churches whom the heavenly Pastor has called each by its name, *nominatim*, which belongs to no other: Chartres, Strasbourg, Beauvais, Albi, Périgueux, Paray-le-Monial, Vézelay, Villeneuve-sur-Fère! “Arise my beloved, my beautiful one. In the openings of rock, in the hollow of wall!” That stone which was the soul’s prison is now become its garment! “What a shower of variety! Flowers have appeared in our land”—flowers in which the sculptor’s hand has collaborated with divine inspiration.

You asked me to arise, says France. Are you satisfied

with my response? What do you think of these javelins which I brandish in my two hands? What do you think of all these spires, and these towers full of bells? What say you to these enormous edifices and these coffers fashioned of the very stuff of your will which I have raised with a mighty effort? And what of these dazzling parterres, the like of which Persia has never boasted, nor the setting sun unrolled upon the deep: this interplay of colors and stories which I have laid down between the piers of my confession?

The clefts, the chinks, the hollow places in the rock, see how I have filled them, and when I pray within, prostrate before your tabernacle, it is in the light of the deeds of all the ages and all the saints that You see me. You enter, Lord, and I have come forth. Do not say that I did not find a way to meet you. A prodigious clergy is at my portals, a procession of priests, monarchs, and warriors, of scholars, women, and maidens. How many angels there are to sound the trumpet at my gables! How many mothers display their babes triumphantly to a marketplace vanquished by their smiles, to the river flowing down there under the succession of its bridges! What arches, what garlands, what limbs, what exfoliations, what mastics cling eagerly to the atmosphere! Neither Angels nor doves nor daws can complain of these nooks, crannies, and roosts which I offer on all sides. *In foraminibus petrae:* behold Jacob's ladder in full operation, for ascent and descent. Behold the house of God and with it, man, suspended from heaven by means of a cross.

*Cantique, 73*

## 65

### *Mary in the Church*

Just as the physical heart unites the body, so the heart of Mary, linked with that in our breast, strives for the unity of the Church in a single collective Christ.

*Accompagnements, 123*

## 66

### *Mary in the Church at Calvary*

"It is consummated," cries the crucified Christ. With the Son, the Mother is consummated, and with the Mother, the Church whose heart and eyes she is, a sepulcher and a body. Behold the testament to which we are the heirs. Behold the outcome of the seven sorrows, the seven days, each of which contains an evening and a morning, a mystery and an illumination. This sepulcher has become a baptistery where we are all immersed as children and where we continue to bathe whenever, overwhelmed with weariness and toil, we come to ask our Father to revive us and make us new.

*Epée, 193*

## 67

### *The Church Praises God*

Listen, says the Church, to this lover who says that I have wounded His heart, now I understand what He wants of me, and which I alone can give Him, and whose purchase makes it worthwhile to die by me, for me, with me! He loves me, and I am engaged for eternity in giving Him, with all my heart and soul, whatever He asks. It is no longer Sinai emitting smoke, but the Temple which the Bible tells us was filled on the day of its consecration with the exhalation of God's glory. Humanity steams like soil which has been turned over, and between this verse and the next, what do I prepare but the raising of the *Magnificat*?

*Emmaüs, 140*

## 68

### *The Liturgy, Universal Prayer*

Listen! Listen and hear all together, rising and falling, swelling and subsiding, wave after wave, the foaming tide of

this sea of words! Interspersed with rude Hebraic syllables, by those mighty accents which sound as if Adam brought them with him from the earthly paradise, the rattle of our familiar dialect is mingled with the thundering vaults of the Roman language and the sharp precision of the Greek logos.

What you hear are not the slender inventions of a finite author; what you hear is the ascension, from pole to pole, from the remotest depths of the origin of man and of the world he lives in, of matter at the mercy of spirit! What you hear is the voice that has been raised to God since the creation of the world, the voice of all that exists, all that suffers, all that believes, all that hopes, all that loves, all that desires, all that sees and all that does not see, all that can speak and all that cannot speak! *Non sunt loquelae neque sermones quorum non audiantur voces eorum.* Such prayer becomes something which, as in Ezechiel's vision, at first touches only our toes, then our knees, then our loins, then our hearts, until finally it becomes a tide which sweeps us away.

*Accompagnements*, 149

## 69

### *The School of the Liturgy*

Though still a stranger to the sacraments,<sup>6</sup> I was already participating in the life of the Church; at last I could breathe, and life was rushing into me at every pore.

But the great book which had been opened to me and which was my schoolroom was the Church. Eternal praise to that great mother at whose knee I learned everything I knew! I spent all my Sundays at Notre Dame and I went there as often as possible during the week. At this time I was as ignorant of my religion as most people are of Buddhism, and the sacred drama unfolded before my eyes with a splendor that surpassed my dreams. Ah, this was no longer the language of books of devotion, but of the profoundest and most

<sup>6</sup> At the time of his conversion.

awesome poetry; here were the noblest gestures ever entrusted to human beings. I could not take my fill of the spectacle of the Mass, and the priest's every movement inscribed itself indelibly upon my mind and heart. The reading of the Office of the Dead, the Office of Christmas, the procession of the days of Holy Week, the sublime song of the *Exultet*, beside which the most inspired accents of Sophocles and Pindar seemed pale to me—all this overwhelmed me with reverence and joy, with gratitude, repentance, and adoration.

*Contacts*, 16

## 70

### *Liturgical Life*

Notre Dame<sup>7</sup> was, of course, the Blessed Virgin, whom I was beginning to understand with all my soul. But it was also that grotto which, through the day-to-day unfolding of its annual mystery in a succession of extraordinary surprises, welcomed me into its dazzling and secret life, into this Passion of Three Hundred Days. That vehement confession of faith which made the stone tremble did not issue from the ordered rows of the choir stalls; it was the victorious culmination of a race which, from the creation of the world, had finally come into its own. That solo voice which rose from time to time was not this laboring child, his eyes fastened on his music; it was Zion celebrating its love!

And when at the foot of the steps the sacerdotal Angel veiled his face with a scrap of gold,<sup>8</sup> with what a trembling heart, with what a deep pang of recognition and consent I beheld Abraham mounting the altar where the sacrificial lamb awaited him! Before my eyes he re-enacted the sacrifice of Melchisedech—and I was there, looking on, beside myself with joy; I had passed from death to life.

*Emmaüs*, 139

<sup>7</sup> The cathedral of Paris, image of the Blessed Virgin.

<sup>8</sup> Claudel refers to the subdeacon's carrying the paten, covered by the humeral, at the Offertory.

## 71

*The Annual Office of the Church*

The Church is the crown of Humanity, just as Humanity is the crown of nature. Both man and nature observe divine worship, and this is why we read in the Psalm that God has crowned the year with His bounty. [Cf. Psalm 64:12]

*J'aime*, 114

## 72

*Unfolding of the Liturgical Cycle Around the Earth*

This planet, this Messiah among worlds, more fortunate than her fellows, *prae consortibus tuis*—freezing, scorching, wild or barren—she appears, she is bathed, she revolves throughout the procession of the year in a series of majestic attitudes and obeisances, the glory radiating from a flaming center, no portion of her surface deprived of the ordered and tempered munificence of this Father of luminaries. Indeed, may she not be said to be perpetually anointed and streaming, as it were, with the oil of gladness, *oleo laetitiae*? And similarly, Christ, King, Master, and Founder of the Church, the *Vir agricola* of the Gospel, gathers and reaps day after day, in the perpetually renewed cycle offered Him by the ecclesiastical year, the harvest of successive benedictions endlessly poured on Him, and through Him on us, by that first Creature whose heart He has managed to win.

*Cantique*, 126

## 73

*The Bible, Foundation of Her Faith and Her Prayer*

Say what you will, it is an amazing thing for God to have spoken distinctly to man and for His word to be recorded for all time in a written document. The Church places

this word, this prayer, in the mouths of each of her priests in the incomparable binding of the breviary. But it is not enough to glance through it with our eyes and lips, we must take hold of it, live with it, steep ourselves in it as did the ancient fathers, in a spirit not of idle curiosity, but of devotion; we must dwell in it, we must store it within ourselves, we must wake and sleep with it. We must be persuaded, and persuaded by actual experience, that, in the words of St. Paul, "All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching" [II Timothy 3:16]—that it is all bread and the only bread we need; we will not accept stones, nor intricate problems without head or tail, in its place.

*Ruth, 20*

## 74

### *Her Prayer: the Breviary*

Indeed, you will find in it a world of the loftiest poetry, but in order to understand it fully it is not enough to read here and there, one must force oneself to follow a whole office, hour by hour—the office of the Assumption, for example. Then, however splendid this collection may be, one must not forget that it is only one inseparable part of the vast structure of the Liturgy: the Missal, the Antiphonary, the Ritual, the Pontifical. Never has such a cathedral been built to the glory of God.

The mistake of the Jesuits, whom in other areas I heartily respect, has been to neglect this magnificent sanctuary and replace it with little devotions which are, I might add, very beautiful in themselves. It is a case of substituting the art of the jeweler for that of the architect.

The curious thing about sacred poetry, which brings the holy literature to life and presents it to us ready-made in the form of an eternal drama, is its close resemblance to the other related Christian arts. As the mosaic-worker takes little cubes of gold and the glass-worker little squares of glass in

order to create new and wonderful patterns, so the great poet which is the Catholic Church has collected from everywhere fragments of the Fathers, of the Bible, of legends, of the poets, to fashion from them a living structure in which all the riches of the universe join harmoniously in a hymn of praise to the Creator.

*Corr. Suarès, 154*

## 75

### *The Treasure of the Scriptures*

What a dazzling, remarkable privilege we enjoy in possessing, bound between the pages of a book, that Holy Spirit which is said to have universal power of suggestion! With what faith, with what reverence, with what fervor must we consult it!

It is not just a word of advice, it is a commandment when the Lord tells us to study the Scriptures. He did not mean a hurried glance, but an impassioned study to which we would be well advised to bring all the resources not merely of our own minds and hearts (that would be little enough), but those which the Church majestically unfolds for us in her doctrine and liturgy. "Ask the beasts," we are told in the Book of Job. [12:7] What beasts? Well, those four who preside over that prodigious Gospel of two testaments with one message, and those four are the Ox, the Lion, the Eagle, and the Angel.

*Accompagnements, 171*

## 76

### *The Grandeur of Preaching*

(Addressed to a priest)

It is not a matter of spinning phrases, or laboriously stitching together some overwrought conceits, but of rising like a tower of strength, like a spear, in a ray of light that rouses us!

What if we have to stammer a little at the beginning, like Moses and the prophets? Preaching is not a painful task; it is simply thinking out loud, praying out loud, loving out loud. Forget the congregation. Someone is listening to you besides these children and these old women—the Angels are there, the enormous family of the living and the dead is there, all eternity is watching these words of purple and gold which escape your lips.

*Accompagnements*, 282

## 77

Lord, I am part of your Church; Lord, I am part of this woman to whom You owe the restoration of Your shaken throne!

*Emmaüs*, 139

## 78

Love of God, total submission to the Church, this is all I have ever tried to say.

*Toi*, 30

# The Communion of Saints

*Le chrétien dans le ciel de sa foi sent palpiter la Toussaint de tous ses frères vivants.*

*Odes*, 88

THE communion of all those who have been regenerated at the same baptismal font and are gathered around the same eucharistic table—saints and sinners, living and dead, strengthened by the blood of Jesus Christ—all are but a single body, participating in his life, helping one another, sharing their labors and rewards. Such is

the concrete aspect of the Christian community, such is the communion of the saints.

In his role as gatherer of the flock, Claudel stresses the importance of this unity, and urges us not to let ourselves be upset by our neighbor's external appearance, so often misleading. Our faith should enable us to pene-

trate beyond the worldly exterior. "Yes, this peasant with his leathery face," he tells us, "this alcoholic, this storekeeper with her mean scowl . . . these are our brothers and sisters." We must learn to detect in them "the star which is embedded in the heart of this tormented flesh." (*Poète*, 265)

Let us widen our horizons, so easily limited to our own tiny province. "The Cenacle has expanded around me," the poet exclaims, "until it coincides with the world." (*Ibid.*, 274) This traveler sitting across from us is not a stranger; "even if his role is a silent one," we have something to give him and, in return, "he augments us, he makes a new man of us." (*Rose*, 130)

Claudel carries this interdependence to its logical conclusion: "the Parisian working girl peels an African banana for her lunch, and a lemon ripened by the sun of Sicily cures the scurvy of a sailor in the polar seas." (*Apocalypse*, 255) Indeed, whether we like it or not, we are all formed from the same dough "in the hands of this formidable baker who molds us in his kneading trough!" (*Isaïe*, 181)

The *Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher*, among other works of Claudel, contain a great many valuable insights<sup>1</sup> regarding the problem of this life in common

<sup>1</sup> "I will call it the art of human beings living together," the author writes in his Preface, in which he considers those human groups which are the family, the

which has become more unavoidable than ever in our time. Here Claudel retraces the features of a universal experience whose significance escapes many of us, but not his shrewd and synthesizing eye. Roads with which man has furrowed the earth since ancient times, the progressive clearing of the land, the radio, and the airplane, with their power to reduce distances—what are all these technical advances but opportunities for communication, for fraternization between different nations, or, in other words, a direct contribution to love and fellowship? In this drama, what an important role has been played simply by the development of tourism, which brings remote peoples together and teaches them to understand and, hence, to love each other!

So proceeds the mysterious construction of that Universe for which God provided the material and which man, His collaborator, must guide to its full and harmonious perfection. "We must come to the rescue of the bramble which wants to become a rose, we must come to the rescue of the birds and the wild animals" by domesticating them, working to bring about a complete communion between man and nature, between man and man, in a single offering to the Creator.

household, the castle, the small town, the factory, the skyscraper ". . . so many cells, of more or less complexity, in the great Christian family."

"The Universe, that impulse toward unity (*versus ad unitatem*) in the etymological sense," writes

Claudel, "is the harmony of the Creation in the confession of a single God!"

## 1

### *Interdependence of All Creatures Since the Creation*

The Bible does not show God arranging the various species (all of which He has indiscriminately produced out of nothing), in such a way that they owe each other nothing. On the contrary, there is communication among them, assistance, love, intercourse, invitation, frustration, decorum, and, within certain prescribed limits, provision for the mutual expression of this vital need for obedience and generation, the offering of the breast to this unknown mouth whose life depends on us. God says not only, *Fiat herba, fiant volatilia et reptilia*, but, *germinet terra herbam virentem; producant aquae reptile et volatile.*

*Figures, 112*

## 2

When God says, "Let the earth bring forth vegetation, let the waters abound with life," He is not speaking to the elements individually but to the unanimity of these vast bodies, so that no part of them may be exempt from care and obedience. Alone and unaided, the soil would be incapable of producing the green grass; it must have water, sunlight, a harmonious complex of previous or attendant conditions surrounding this conception. And this is even truer in the case of animate creatures. Nothing is possible without universal co-operation, without a laboratory completely arranged in advance.

God speaks in turn to the two parts of the material creation: the dry land and the waters, which correspond to

that mysterious pair who were first created: the earth and the heavens. The reptiles and the birds correspond to the devils and the angels, while this living soul which the earth is requested to produce presupposes the combined industry and effort of all these successive births, from the reign of chaos to the dawn of meaning and of man. For man is a part of all the Creation under him; like Job, he addresses it as "my mother and my brothers," a kinship which resides not only in his flesh and bones but in his very soul, whose final kindling would not have been possible without the sun.

*Figures*, 117

### 3

#### *Love of Neighbor*

The second of the great commandments charges us to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is what is meant by fellowship: that there is not one of these individuals whom an ill-named chance thrusts in our path and offers to our scrutiny who is not our brother and with whom, as children of God, we are not the co-heirs of a certain joint legacy.

Yes, this peasant with his leathery face, this cringing and surly alcoholic, the image of the concierge's fat dog, this storekeeper, with her mean scowl, repainting her ancient lips: these are our brothers and sisters; Jesus Christ died for them. There is a star embedded in the heart of this tormented flesh, deeper than the redeeming drachma in the belly of the carp of Genesareth.

*Poète*, 265

### 4

Loving our neighbor means something altogether different from courtesy, or a doubtful and meager forbearance. It springs from the awareness of this universal summons, this interrogation which will not tire of knocking until the door

has been opened; somewhere, some debt is owed to us which we cannot remove until it has been discharged.

The day has come when it is absolutely necessary that we learn to get along with this brother who is thrust forcibly, whether we want him or not, into our arms.

*Epée*, 66

## 5

### *Interdependence of Souls*

The individual soul, in order to be itself, to know itself in its individuality, to find itself and to give itself, has need of the whole Church; it exists only in relation to the indispensable role and duty to which it has been assigned. It is only then that it begins truly to live and to function, it is only then that it becomes meaningful, as the word becomes meaningful in relation to the sentence, the sentence in relation to the page, and so forth.

*Cantique*, 120

## 6

The eye of the Christian does not remain on the surface of things, but sees through to the bottom. He knows that the man sitting across from us in this train compartment, and whom we will have ample time to observe and study between Lyon and Paris, is our brother, he is an irreplaceable image of God; we have the power to do him good, and he in turn has the power to bring out some new and strange side of our nature. Even if his role is a silent one, we know that together we are engaged in a solemn and momentous drama in which any mistake or failure involves fearful and grievous consequences. Friend, enemy, whoever comes in contact with us, has something to give us, and we have something to give him. He augments us, he makes a new man of us.

*Rose*, 130

## 7

All around us we feel the presence and claims of a choir and a congregation whom we are obliged to maintain out of our own resources. Look compassionately, Lord Jesus, on this invisible network, this city of prayer whose services are sustained by a single budget, and all these branches working for me, some within arm's reach, others beyond the horizon. Listen indulgently to this phrase which we are struggling so painfully to achieve together.

*Poète*, 268

## 8

*The Cohesion of the Mystic Body*

More firmly, more substantially than stone is joined to stone or beam joined to wall, more organically than the heart is connected to the lungs or the intestine to the backbone, or than the *mi* blends with the *do* to present the ear with a single tone, is each member of the church dependent on all the others. Only by this dependence is he fully himself, fully able to discharge his vital duty to become the child of God. He can no more dispense with the others than he can escape their reciprocal need of him, in the fullness of that freedom whose enjoyment is called love. This is what is meant by the Communion of the Saints.

*Apocalypse*, 202

## 9

The idea of love carries with it the notions of debtor and creditor. Love makes each of us a debtor and a creditor in relation to God, and in relation to our neighbor, who is God's image. Our neighbor's existence ceases to be a pure and simple reality which we must adjust to and put up with as best

we can. We exercise a legal claim and “interest” over him, just as he exercises one over us. We reckon on him and we have him to reckon with; we must take him into consideration, make allowances for him, and answer to him. We serve him and he serves us. We live by him, in him, through him, and for him. He is to us both cause and effect. He produces a certain image of God in relation to us, and we produce a certain image of God in relation to him. Can we have too much of God or too much of God’s image?

*Ev. Isaïe*, 171

## 10

*Non impediās musicam.* [Sirach 32:3] What is this music that should not be interrupted? First of all, that of the concert of human life, in which we must all carry our part, whether great or small. We are not grasshoppers who can chirp at the top of their voices, hanging to the back of a pine tree all through a long summer’s day. We must pay attention to what goes on around us; and our fate depends in large measure on the acuteness of our hearing, the quality of our intelligence, and the virtuosity of our reflexes.

*Sophie*, 214

## 11

### *Communion of Sinners*

The Credo speaks of a communion of Saints, but there is also a communion of sinners. It is impossible to observe that engine up there in the vault of the church,<sup>2</sup> or, rather, that handle, that hook, which is used to manipulate the vast living net which drags and plunders the deep, without each of us becoming aware of the knot which I represent, the weight and pull of this living network around me in which I am grievously enmeshed by all four members of my person.

*Poète*, 267

<sup>2</sup> The cross.

## 12

*Universal Participation in Christ*

In partaking of the flesh of Christ, we partake also of His goodness and His kindness, and hence of His desire to communicate Himself; for goodness, theology informs us, is self-propagating. By partaking of Christ we attain a ripeness suitable to the refreshment of other souls. Thus the Parisian working girl peels an African banana for her lunch, and a lemon ripened by the sun of Sicily cures the scurvy of a sailor on the polar seas.

*Apocalypse, 255*

## 13

All these nations which claimed to live independently of one another, each within itself, like islands, are now compassed by a single pair of arms. It is good to be cured of these limitations in the arms of a lover who is stronger than they are; it is good to be in the hands of this formidable baker who molds us in his kneading trough!

*Ev. Isaie, 181*

## 14

*Souls Compared to the Stars*

Baruch says that God has called the stars, and they are continually replying, *Adsumus!* And the Psalmist tells us that He has not only called them, but called each by name. Let us consider them, ranged above us, each one admirable, though different in rank and worth, each one equally precious to its Creator, and each one perpetually enriching in a new way the columns of an inexhaustible almanac! O nations! O grains of flour! O multitude! O blossoming of All Saints' Day! O echo, O thing of infinite motion all absorbed in standing still!

*Rose, 238*

## 15

### *Unity in Prayer*

God knows me not only through the relations I maintain with Him, but through those I carry on with that numberless company to which I belong, with all my brothers who, in order to know, love, and work with God, constitute a single body, a single Catholic church in time and space. All this God led out of the land of Egypt, all this He called together to make a sacrifice to Him in the desert. "For where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them." [Matt. 18:20] If this is true on earth, what will it be in heaven, where it will no longer be only two or three people, but all Humanity who will be reunited in a single love, a single desire, a single understanding? Alone and unaided, I am unable to know God or be known by Him. I need the whole Church! It is only through this social organization that I come into my own and find, by being born into it, the pathway to understanding and power. What joy to find and give myself utterly, my whole self effectively; not just give all of myself, but give all to all!

*Cantique*, 333

## 16

### *Union in Daily Life*

And how can we fail to be interested in the idea of these millions of tables, cafés, salons, shops, and bars where, as on so many carpenters' benches, is accomplished for better or worse the joining of the news of the day with our personal interests?

*Conversations*, 19

## 17

*The Joy of Giving*

I mean the joy of not being nothing—for not to live for anything or anyone is to be nothing. I mean the joy of ceasing to be ourselves in order to become one with the will of God who has made us His instruments! The need, the duty, the necessity, is to surrender our life to those around us—to whom it belongs—that life which is perpetually born and reborn within us!

*Conversations, 37*

## 18

*The Art of Communal Living*

Were we not saying just now that the communal life of a complex group of human beings is by no means a simple or spontaneous thing, the natural result of throwing people together, animal-fashion, achieved on the first try by some crude instinct, but that it is a difficult experiment, demanding infinite virtue and art?

—No doubt; especially virtue.

—Virtue, indeed, but almost as much art, with all that the word connotes of acute observation, intelligence, perseverance, flexibility, courage, and delicacy of execution.

*Conversations, 59*

## 19

*The Model of Monastic Life*

How fine it would be if all men were at once aware of what they were doing in the sight of someone who watches them with care, of how they help one another, of the ritual in which they take part, of the invaluable offering they make

simply by raising their eyes to heaven, of the delightful communication which they enjoy! There is something of this quality in the Benedictine life.

The life of the monk means more than chanting in the choir, rendering for each hour of the day the burden of praise it owes the Creator; it is the life itself, ordinary, everyday life: getting up, the garden, the work, the communal meal, almost as solemn as Mass. At a less serious level, there are habits to be laundered; lamps to be lit, which are great symbols; a sick person to be tended; a visitor to be greeted. If men were only a little more aware of what they are all doing together this very moment, they would feel as if they were in church, singing in a chorus. How they all love one another without knowing it, and how beautiful it would be if they knew! If only they could do consciously what they now do unawares! Then there would no longer be anything secular; everything would be sacred, everything would be dedicated to God.

*Conversations, 102*

## 20

### *Communal Life*

When we consider that the war against ourselves, the struggle of the water against the clay and the fire against the wick, is our first duty, that penance is one of the basic needs of our nature, that we are incomplete, an unacceptable rough draft which must be offered patiently and manfully to the hand of Providence and circumstance in order to spring forth and germinate at last—what could be more ideal than communal living? Where could we find more opportunities for forgiveness, humility, and charity, so that our most ordinary, everyday existence and our simplest actions were a constant application of these excellent virtues? And from another point of view, where could we find keener mortifications, a more salutary or merciless revelation of our weaknesses, a more punctual surveillance, a more point-blank opposition to our

flabbiness and capriciousness, a more unyielding yoke for our pride and jealousy and, in the phrase of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a salad with more seasoning?

If our Christian calling is indeed a reality for us, if we are truly seeking eternal life at the expense of our immediate instincts, are not these better than chains, fasting, and hair shirts? What could be more natural or more ingenious? What better path to perfection? To suffer while doing good: should not this be the aim and normal way of life of every Christian? For if a man does not suffer, it is because life has suspended its work on him.

*Conversations, 178*

## 21

### *Communion with the Dead*

The dead continue to help us by means of their works, their merits, and their intercession; we enjoy their inheritance. And fortunately, we, too, can help them; the prayer of a good priest can depopulate entire provinces of Purgatory, and who shall say what unknown souls we have touched now and then with the beads of our rosaries?

But our charitable duty to the dead does not end here, and what I was saying a moment ago about charity to the living applies to them as well. It is not enough for us to help them, we must place them in a position to do good and, like those underground seeds recovered in ancient tombs, to bear fruit. It is up to us to bring all these dead back to life. Between the two worlds, a circulation with myriad ramifications is established by the ever-beating heart of the Church.

*Cantique, 359*

## 22

### *The Offering Up of the Whole Universe Through Man*

Everything communes and communicates with God. God has placed the whole creation in my hands that I may

petition Him and gain an audience, and present Him with the spectacle of His own goodness, and of the irresistible commitment to which His goodness has given rise.

God did not find the whole world too great a gift to give me, nor do I find it too great a gift to give Him in return. I sympathize with every creature's need to praise God, and with its need of me in order to do so. And this is the true meaning of that word *misericors* which recurs in every line of the Psalms, and which gives us the key to the whole world.

The universe represents an absence of something, and it is this lack which is the source of our wealth. The world needs God, and God has placed Himself in the hands of each of us that we may restore Him to the world.

*Emmaüs*, 228

## 23

God, God Himself, Lord of Battle, has surrendered Himself to me for all time, to possess and to portion out!

*Emmaüs*, 230

## 24

### *Suffering and the Communion of the Saints*

Thérèse does not stir. She is in the wine press. The whole universe is in the wine press. And this prisoner, held fast in the narrowest confines of the law, has been named by the Church, patron saint of Missions. The whole universe exerts pressure on her in order to extract her blood; it needs this blazing fire in order to burn away its darkness in an odor of sweetness. She does not stir. She cannot stir. How could she help you and me if she evaded this geometrical captivity, this duty to the world? Or, if I may be permitted a more daring image, she is like an abscess on this sick body which is mankind: the malady is divine; she draws its inflammation . . .

She asks nothing for herself, for this would thwart the

divine work in which she is utterly absorbed. Behold Thérèse, completely annihilated in her duty.

*Trois figures, 47*

## 25

### *The Unifying Role of the Market Place*

An experimental study might be done on town life and the way in which one organ gradually becomes specialized amid the random activity of the populace. Commerce tends always to collect around a crossroads; the great stores of today are the logical conclusion. The halls, the markets, the shop windows: what beautiful architectural analogies might be found for the display of meats, vegetables, and fabrics were we not blinded by our private greeds and by the hideous development of advertising!

Commerce would soon lose its feverish, greedy, brutal, and mercenary quality.<sup>3</sup> It would be first and foremost, as its name implies, a means of bringing people together and enabling them to help one another. How beautiful are the feet of those good people who each morning bring us tomatoes and fresh milk, and all those splendid fish packed in ice! Commerce should be looked upon as a way of making these magnificent and excellent things available to us: if we cannot cram everything into our baskets, at least nothing prevents us from feasting our eyes and exercising, albeit empty-handed, the royal privilege of choice.

A market place is a sort of Pentecost, a daily offering of all the good fruits of the earth. And the wholesome influence of the pharmacy, which I almost forgot to mention: yes, no market would be complete without a little bitter-sweet visit to the dealer in medicines.

*Conversations, 150*

\* If we were to erect statues in the market place—to the patron saint of butchers, of milliners, etc. . . .

**26***Commerce and Charity*

The act of the man who buys a loaf of bread at the bakery would be, if both participants knew what they were doing, as grave, as solemn, and as sacred as the gesture of the two priests who salute each other after communion by placing their hands on one another's shoulders.

*Positions II, 47*

**27***The Role of Industry*

(Niagara, center of activity.)

Niagara has taken on a distinctly industrial appearance. It is a machine among machines, a formidable sluice gate, a torrent of such magnitude that it demands not only our admiration, but the precise and perpetual yoking of a world of wheels and gadgets to its thrust. It is a whole Mediterranean, it is the five Great Lakes, it is the central reservoir of an entire continent which flows through this narrow conduit. How could we have left this energy untapped and incomplete? Was it not just as necessary to attach a dynamo to it as it is to saddle a horse? Now Niagara is a whole world moving and creating movement which, by means of enormous whirling spindles, is translated into motion, light, chemical decomposition, and streams of molten metal, heating our water and grilling our chops.

*Conversations, 225*

**28***Work in a Factory*

Just as the music draws the dancers from all directions, so the power and the plant attract the workers. There is a

mass kidnaping of people carried away by a common rhythm. They lose themselves in the singleness of the job to be done, like marching soldiers at the sound of the military band. A multitude of people at once realize that they are no different, and that they are all obeying the same tempo. Perhaps the day will come when all human productivity will proceed in the manner of a great orchestra, and the Spirit will breathe over our towns as into the coils of a gigantic musical instrument.

*Conversations, 226*

## 29

### *The Earth Reunited (Vision of the Future)*

ST. MAURICE: Do you really think the day will come when the earth will begin to emerge as a single church?

GREGORY: It has already begun. . . . This is the goal of the millions of workers and engineers who have understood that order once given to the Precursor to make the crooked ways straight and the rough places smooth. What could be smoother than that cement highway which runs along the Pacific coast from Los Angeles to Seattle?

ST. MAURICE: And all those wires above the roads! And my airplane at large in the freedom of the sky!

GREGORY: And these boats on the sea! Yes, and these secret antennae which tickle the atmosphere and the invisible, the thrill imparted to the fluid which penetrates everything, so that we are brought together not only by the outer organs but by the inner compass of a vast sensibility.

*Conversations, 232*

## 30

This taming of Nature, of which we are speaking, is it not everywhere under way? Have we not made roads through the Alps, built causeways across the swamplands, and staked out land in the desert?

These views, these terraces, these hotels, these belvederes—never before had anyone ever thought to stop at them and stay a while. They provide us with all sorts of texts which we have only to decipher. Each year millions of unconscious pilgrims on vacation go to pray to God in the desert and, at the sight of the setting sun, discover deep in their souls a sort of embryonic psalm.

*Conversations, 238*

### 31

That golden angel atop the steeple which flashes for a second amid a fall of clouds, that track of flour down there which is a new suburb, and that smoke in the wheatfield below is the railroad. While I speak the plane has flown on to the next county. Within my arms' span I measure the earth which belongs to me, and I swim in the glory of God.

*Conversations, 239*

### 32

We must fly to the rescue of each creature and bring it whatever it needs to achieve that Catholic confession it labors painfully to bring forth—that is, the Universe, that impulse toward unity: the harmony of the Creation in the confession of a single God!

Yes, we must come to the rescue of this suffering Creation which has need of us. We must come, first of all, to the rescue of humanity, but we must also come to the rescue of the bramble which asks to become a rose, of this mighty river which asks us to prevent it from overflowing; we must come to the rescue of the birds and wild beasts and all the animals according to their kind.

Situated as we are between God and Nature, we must come to the rescue of both; we must throw open between them those arteries, those conduits through which Mercy rushes to meet Justice; we must help them find each other

again, no longer merely in future hope or past pain, but in the present possession of the Pentecost and of Easter.

We must carry everywhere order, proportion, fertility, and law. Nature must understand in her bowels this command which we bring her in the name of her Creator. The Redeeming Word must be heard by everything that the Creating Word has begot, and nothing must remain ignorant of its glorious revelation.

*Conversations, 257*

### 33

The Cenacle has expanded around me, until it coincides with the world. I am one, not only with this church of stone which surrounds me like some insubstantial organism—like a harp with its filaments taut—but with all the souls who are longing and praying at this moment. I am one with all these good hearts struggling to find a voice, with all this patient supplication.

*Poète, 274*

### 34

#### *Dialogue*

GREGORY: A great invitation has been issued to the four corners of the universe, like the one in the parable when the Father invites us to His Son's marriage feast. The table is set, and everywhere the order has been issued for communion with God.

ST. MAURICE: So from now on the order of the day is communion with God.

GREGORY: Communion of all men with one another. Communion of man and Nature.

ST. MAURICE: Through knowledge and power, and through a great sowing of words. . . . Communion of man and Nature through communication, law, and husbandry.

GREGORY: Consecration of all Nature by herself, and in a state of universal grace.

ST. MAURICE: Consecration by herself by her Creator.

*Conversations*, 263

## 35

### *The Church Bell Calls Christians Together*

I am not the monk in the choir; I am the bell in the belfry, tirelessly calling, the bell ringer who summons all earth, all heaven, all nature, all mankind, all the universe to the service of God.

I am that great bell in the heart of the universe;<sup>4</sup> I am not a single peal, like that melancholy summons, that desperate entreaty which rings from time to time in Buddhist monasteries as if to deepen their gloom, but a mighty tide, wave after wave, which invades and drowns everything.

*Lettres inédites*<sup>5</sup>

## 36

### *The Belfry of Brangues Speaks to Its Flock*

It is good to send one's prayers aloft, but it is also good to take the benediction, the doctrine, and the word, wring them from one's heart, and scatter them beneath one in great handfuls as grain to fowls.

Thanks to this Angel whose soaring wings are ever at my service, there is a whole diocese at my feet whose temporary priest I have become. I say good-day, from up there, to sixty thousand souls at a time.

How good they would become if they knew that there is someone up there who is watching them all at once!

And I hail my vertical colleagues down there in the

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Claudel's poem, *La nuit de Pâques*. (*Trans.*)

<sup>5</sup> *Lettres inédites de mon parrain Paul Claudel*, by A. du Sarment (Gabalda, 1959).

distant haze, like so many petrified landmarks on whose façades a ray of sunlight picks out a flash of gold.

But when one realizes the tremendous force for life and growth of Almighty God, of the spirit of the whole Kingdom of Heaven which each of us carries within us, tell me, is it not sad that we let ourselves be walled and confined in this manner? Is there not some way to channel the tremendous force of the Catholic faith to all mankind?

*Lettre à l'Ange gardien*<sup>6</sup>

## 37

There are times when I want to speak to the whole world!

*Lettre à l'Ange gardien*

<sup>6</sup> Article from *Vie Intellectuelle*, December, 1946.

# The Forgiveness of Sins

*Je regarde et vois toutes mes années derrière moi et toutes mes actions bonnes et mauvaises.*

*Les mauvaises sont effacées par le sang du Christ et par la pénitence.  
Et s'il fut quelque bien de fait, que Dieu lui donne croissance.*

*Odes, 201*

“**I**NDEED, in guilt was I born, and in sin my mother conceived me,” says the Psalmist. [50:7] All of us without exception, save the Mother of God, come into the world stamped with the seal of sin, have been born children of wrath ever since our first father, by his fall, closed to us the gates of paradise. But God, without

weakening His justice, contrived to become man. The Incarnation of the Word effects a reconciliation between the irate Father and mankind: through the merits of His life and of His ignominious death, Christ, voluntary expiatory victim, has renewed relations between His Father and Humanity. “You know that you were re-

deemed . . . not with perishable things, with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." [I Peter 1:18-19]

The sacrifice of Calvary is the essential Deed which procures the forgiveness of sins and restores to us the good will of God.

How is this forgiveness bestowed on us as individuals? By means of a sacrament which transforms a child of wrath into a Christian: Baptism. This rite, a prerequisite for admission into the Father's Kingdom, obliterates from our souls not only the original sin inherited from Adam, but all the personal sins we may have acquired, together with their corresponding penalties. It incorporates us into the Church, grants us sanctifying grace, or the life of God within us, and confers upon us the glorious name of child of God. Such magnificent gifts and prerogatives indicate the vital importance of this sacrament.

However, we are weak creatures and subject to sin even after baptism. It was therefore appropriate that there be a second sacrament to re-establish, when necessary, our innocence and our union with God: this is the sacrament of Penance, which only priests can administer and which, by means of complete repentance for our sins, cleanses us of all impurity.

External circumstances for which the soul is not responsible

can sometimes prevent the receiving of one or the other of these sacraments; in such cases, Baptism of desire or perfect contrition take their place.

Martyrdom, or testimonial of faith by the sacrifice of one's life, can also take the place of Baptism: this is called Baptism of blood. As for the mental attitudes required in all cases, whatever the circumstances, they are: faith in the true God professed by the Catholic Church, theological hope, penitence, and at least some love of God. Only children in early infancy receive the sacrament without being aware of it, but their godfather or godmother answers for them.

Claudel takes it for granted that his readers are familiar with the above catechism. A shrewd psychologist, he analyzes with a searching profundity the hostile attitude of the soul which resists God's forgiveness. He makes this startling statement, "The All-Powerful is defeated." (*Poète*, 260) Indeed, the Lord does not violate our free will, but He does take advantage of the slightest chink in the armor of our pride, of our slightest impulse away from sin, to work His way into us and, deep in our hearts, to plant the seeds of repentance. He searches out "the weak spot and the joint" in this "hard kernel" which resists Him. (*Poète*, 228)

If the soul then agrees to accept its remodeling, its cure, it

will come to know this correcting hand "which has resumed Its work on us and which often so cruelly searches, pursues, insists, undoes, redoies. . . . The hand of God at work," says Claudel, is now no longer carving Its commandments on the rock of Sinai, but "on the living, quivering flesh of Its creatures." But will He harrow this flesh beyond all bearing? No, because He wants only to inscribe on it the "propositions of Love." (*Présence et Prophétie*, 111)

The Lord did not disdain to mingle with the rabble of sinners and publicans, those people protected by "a thick layer of fat, grime, and petrified habits." (*Présence*, 112) And behold, each one has felt the bonds of sin snap within him, life has returned to the hardened limb. And if the soul's defenses were such that, after having knocked all night long on our door, whose bolts are "bad habits and ill will," it still holds out, perhaps by dawn it will be weary of this persistence and will say, "Lord, we will try to admit you!" (*Toi*, 52) Unless Mary herself comes to unlock "our eyelids with her rose-fresh fingers." (*Cantique*, 292)

Who knows but that sometimes a grave error, with the repentance it provokes and the great breach it opens in our defenses, may not become the providential opportunity for the Good Shepherd to find His way in? Hence David in tears, after his error, became reconciled

to his beloved Yahweh, who exclaims, "I have him. *Inveni David!*"

"We went through fire and water," says the Psalmist [65:12], the water of tears and the fire of remorse, and behold, we live again. "Ah! How good it is, this air which is breathed into me," says the sinner after he has been cleansed and purified. "Full of grace," yes, this is the cry of the guilty soul, "suddenly acquitted, which cannot have enough of its pardon." (*Cantique*, 293)

To what can we attribute this complete transformation? Only to the boundless mercy of God. "Ah, we know that between the Father and our eyes a look of love is possible," says Claudel. (*Présence*, 104) It is no longer heaven, "it is God Himself who welcomes the trusting and contrite heart." (*Ibid.*, 118)

If the example of David did not suffice, that of the good thief would finally convince us of the inexhaustible goodness of our heavenly Father: "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." In one flash, grace has touched this repulsive exterior and made good all the deficiencies of virtue. . . . On this sordid fork, it is no longer a criminal brought to justice that we see; it is a martyr, a sacrificial offering that shines forth." (*Poète*, 114)

"Happy is he whose fault is taken away, whose sin is covered." [Psalm 31:1]

**1****Sin**

Wherein lay the original sin? In an action which constituted the first heresy or falling away, that is, a preference of ourselves to God.

This sin immediately affected the man who committed it, not only as a creature, but as a cause and source in his own right. God made man, and sin counterfeited him. Thus man passed himself onto his descendants just as he was. He could not give them more than he was himself—God's image excommunicated, as it were, from its model, isolated, corrupted, and counterfeit. He perverted the original impulse. He can no longer bring forth in the free, open air a living image of God, but must forge in this closed space, which will henceforth be his abode, that idol which he has chosen in its stead.

Through mortal sin, man ceases to be one with Christ; he places himself in a state of isolation and estrangement.

If at the moment of death the soul is under the influence of original sin, it comes before God as a thing equipped for finitude to which one would offer the infinite, that is, something it cannot assimilate. It has no organs suitable for divinity. It is like a fish out of water. Thus God cannot give Himself to this soul, but if it has earned a finite happiness, He can grant it a finite happiness in Limbo: a peace without possession, a sort of outward consent, in sum, not unlike that conception which the Buddhists and pagans have of the future life.

*Positions II, 93–97*

**2*****The Resistance of the Sinner***

Long enough our Lord has waited on the threshold of our soul, meeting only a blank stare. Long enough we have

carried on across the sill, as it were, a dialogue full of mis-understanding and hesitation. Across the confessional grill the admission of our sins has flown. "Let me hear your voice, my son, for your voice is sweet!" But what of that voice which grants me absolution!

*Apocalypse, 228*

### 3

#### *The Shutting Off of the Soul*

"Behold I stand at the door and knock." [Apoc. 3:20] What is meant, if not that lost door in the basement of our soul, that door stained with the blood of the Lamb, that mysterious eastern gate mentioned by the prophet Ezechiel [10:19], through which only the Saviour of mankind may pass. How sad and unfair that this door must be shut!

We are like a bad tenant allowed to remain through charity in a house which does not belong to him, which he has neither built nor paid for, and who barricades himself and refuses to receive the rightful owner even for a minute. But one stormy night he is all alone in his lonely and desolate house and, suddenly, there comes a knock! The knock is not at the front door, but at that old door which he thought was boarded up for good. There is no mistake, someone is knocking! Someone has knocked inside him and it has brought him pain, as when a child stirs for the first time in its mother's womb.

Who was at the door? There is no doubt about it; it is He who comes like a thief in the night, He of whom it is written, "Behold, the bridegroom is coming, go forth to meet him!" [Matt. 25:6] And he listens, panting with terror.

Perhaps He will knock only once? Or perhaps He will hurl Himself against the door all night, and he will listen until morning as though the noise was merely a banging shutter.

It is such a nuisance to get up and open that old door! It is fastened with two bolts which sum up all that is inert

and immovable: one is called "bad habits" and the other, "ill will." As for the lock, that is our own secret. The key is lost. We would have to get oil to make it turn. And then, if we were to open the door, what would be there? The night, the great primeval wind that breathes upon the Waters, someone whom we cannot see, but who would never again let us be comfortably at home. Spirit of God, do not come in, I am afraid of the night air!

And yet, there was a knock; and where did we feel it? In our heart, our mind, our flesh. God not only knocks, He pushes. Now a violent shove, a profound testing of our resistance, now a persistent, nagging, and constant pressure. And not only does He push (*pulso*, pulsation) like the arteries throbbing painfully around a bruise; He strikes, with one of those sudden blows that stop the heart. Or He simply blends Himself with each beat of this heart which He has made, and which continues to make us, this inner forge which constantly turns out feelings and thoughts. He is continually sounding us. And always and everywhere He meets only this unyielding and immovable wall.

Ah, Lord, we will try to admit You, we know that it grieves You to have to knock on our door.

*Toi*, 53

## 4

"And everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God." [I John 4:7] And if we do not love, there forms in us a sort of hard core of obduracy, a sort of anti-Christian organ which inhales itself, which attempts to draw from itself its vital breath, its *raison d'être*.

*Cantique*, 337

## 5

If we had the eyes of angels, we would not see many little St. Francises, all naked. Instead we would see those

ponderous performers of the Dance of Death: the General, the Doctor, the Tradeswoman, the Noblewoman, and the Professor, larded with iron, leather, fur, parchment, and three or four layers of clothing, not to mention the fat underneath. Armor-plated, soldered, and steeled—the Apocalypse could tell us all we need to know on the subject of armor!

It is our own workmanship of petrification, the armor which we have fitted for ourselves, manufactured a section at a time, conceived by intelligence, adjusted by art, buckled on by habit! It is this flabbiness, more impenetrable than stone, and this skintight reptilian garment, slippery and shining! And finally it becomes this ever-shifting tissue of reflections and inventions which makes us not only forbidding but invisible! Let us not forget the filth which covers us from head to foot!

A chink in the armor, a chink leading to the soul! It would take more than a hatchet to make an impression here!

*Cantique*, 201

## 6

### *The Pursuit of the Sinner*

The Good Shepherd will have His troubles recovering this stray who has lodged himself in the most “impossible” place, as they say—but is anything impossible for such an animal? He has come a long way from the naïveté of Genesis; he has succeeded not only in hiding but in disappearing altogether, in banishing from his soul or his countenance any traces which might betray him as a child of God. But he will not escape these creating and judging hands, these fearful and jealous hands which resume their work.

*Présence*, 110

## 7

The All-Powerful is defeated.<sup>1</sup> He is powerless. He created heaven and earth but He cannot do anything with this creature who simply says, "No." This child—it is hopeless; never will He succeed in winning him over. Never will He succeed in retrieving that piece of Himself which has been buried in the rebel. He is not wanted. He shows us hell, and we laugh; it is an overworked threat. He offers heaven and earth, and we decline. He comes down in person, He offers Himself. "He laid aside his garments." [Cf. John 13:4] He falls at our feet, He seizes them, He kisses them, He waters them with His tears. We thrust Him aside with abhorrence, with hatred, with mockery, or, worse still, with boredom, with a yawn, with a weary and indolent gesture. It is not even worth discussing.

*Poète*, 260

## 8

Man can refuse his creator his mind; he cannot refuse him his lungs. No sooner has man finished uttering his denials and his blasphemies than he is forced on pain of death to reclaim that breath which created him and draw it into the depths of his being. Here there dwells a prisoner whose bolts and walls will not indefinitely prevent him from escaping, for the Son of Man not only forced the gates of hell from without, but tore them off their hinges from within. In the dead of night we are suddenly aware that a light has been kindled deep in that secret place where someone lies dozing and bound with two chains, and lo, all at once he has risen, all shackles have been thrown off as if at the scent of fire.

*Présence*, 115

<sup>1</sup> Claudel refers to Christ on the cross, suffering for hardened sinners.

**9***Our Supreme Master*

This is the creating hand, “the finger of the right hand of the Father,” which has resumed its work on us and which (so cruelly for the poor flesh) searches, pursues, insists, undoes, redoing. “Pity me, pity me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has struck me!” cries Job [19:21] and with him, all the tormented souls of the Old and New Testaments.

We benefit from an intervention. We are robbed of a part of our autonomy, and diminished in our ability to abuse it. We have taken a boarder. We must live with this intruder who has His own ideas and who tends to His own comforts; He is someone who does not hesitate to drive nails into the walls wherever He pleases, and who cuts up the furniture for firewood, taking over our bodily and earthly property. We must keep a record of this internal activity, this exploitation for unknown motives, this inborn adversary who carries on His work at our expense and for our profit.

*Présence*, 113

**10**

The eye of God is not halted by this hard kernel, this perfect and spherical resistance whose weak spot and joint the keenest blade would seek to no avail. “I will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them. I will remove the stony heart from their bodies, and replace it with a natural heart.” [Ezech. 11:19]

*Poète*, 228

## 11

### *The Expiatory Suffering*

Suffering was for Christ the essential element in man's nature. Through Him, suffering ceased to be gratuitous; now it purchases something, and this something is what Christ came to earth to bring us. He came to show us what we are capable of purchasing and redeeming with this payment, of purchasing and redeeming for ourselves and for others with a coin of universal currency whose expenditure, moreover, is obligatory, our only choice being whether to invest it or let it go to waste.

Thus the man who suffers is, in no sense, idle or unused wealth. He is at work and, through his collaboration with the cruel and beneficial hands at work on him, he earns not perishable and relative wealth, but absolute and world-wide securities of his own. He is altogether transposed by necessity. For his suffering is necessary in the sense that he is not free to refuse it; he himself is necessary to the suffering. Something is happening for which his body and soul, his presence is indispensable, and which could not happen without him. Through sacrifice, everything in him has become action. Wonder of wonders! His work is to be worked upon; it is he himself who provides the raw material for this mysterious craftsmanship. It is his soul which undergoes the operation of hands as skilled and delicate as those of an artist; there is someone at work on him who forbids him to revert to normal, who demands something more from him, and who patiently, interminably, and in a strangely human manner, interrogates him—tormenting him until he has given the essential response, that "yes" which often is mingled with his dying breath.

**12**

Thus suffering resembles Grace in that it is a gratuitous choice—if it be permissible to make an analogy between nature and the gift of God. Nevertheless, there is this distinction, that we can avoid the one but not the other, which takes us by force. The first reaches the body by way of the soul, the other addresses itself to the soul by way of the body. One resembles a poisoning, the other an assault. But both isolate us from the world and place us in the hands of someone who is in the world not as the part in the whole, but as the cause in the effect. It is the Cause who made us and who is not satisfied with His work, and who in resuming it, compels our attention. The invalid and the saint: both are people whom God will not leave in peace.

*Positions II, 247*

**13**

*The Difficulty of Conversion*

This Christian and reasonable life is not an easy one. It is not easy in the observance, and still less so for the convert who, through his own weakness, has lost the advantages of habit and training. The idea of losing that freedom enjoyed by the horse in the pasture, the obligation of going periodically to some authority, however paternal, and making the most humiliating confessions, are not particularly delightful, and nature violently resists these usages whose value reason alone enables us to see.

*Positions II, 144*

**14**

*The Repentance of the Believer*

Oedipus, faced with his guilt, finds no solution but to gouge out his eyes. But David does not destroy his: he needs them to weep with.

*Emmaüs, 235*

**15***God Finds Us Through Sin*

The true David is not that luminous figure atop the highest tower who created worlds with a harp in his hands; he is this naked and haggard worm at the bottom of the lake, swallowing his tears in the suffocating gloom. And it is only now that God who, like a sculptor, had been eying His work with some misgiving, exclaims, "I have him! I have him, at last! I've got him at last—the David I was looking for! Here he is, as he really is."

*Emmaüs*, 236

**16**

No sooner do I sin than I procure for myself an attentive judge. In the eyes of my Maker, I revert to my original self, and I read in His eyes what I have done to Him.

*Emmaüs*, 236

**17***The Conscience*

It is no longer outside myself, on stone, that the commandments of Sinai are inscribed, but in my heart, like a new message to my most secret sensibility, my most private communications. . . . *Malum coram Te feci*. . . . I have sinned in Your eyes, yes, I know it. It is You only whom I have sinned against and if, by sinning, I have succeeded only in finding a judge, this alone would be a great blessing to me, but this is not enough and You have permitted me to find a father!

*Emmaüs*, 238

## 18

*Appeal to the Messiah*

Holy Messiah! Come and bring peace to this disordered factory, come and teach us the meaning of care, come and tighten the bolts of this machine which keeps coming apart, destroy in us the whims of unbridled fancy and all that is dead but tries to pass for living, put our accounts in order. I know, Lord, that You ask only one thing, O Patience! and that is for us to rid the floor of all these inferior foremen who prevent You from doing Your job!

*Ev. Isaïe, 96*

## 19

*The Painful Purification of the Soul*

It is no easy matter to bring into the world and offer to eternal life a child of God! It is a constant struggle and then, if only we could see what we are doing! But no, we must labor in the dark, weeping in our throes, against nature, by faith alone! Every sick person is actually giving birth before our eyes. It is no easy matter to strip off the chrysalis, for, when we have cast aside the husk of the body, there remains the pupa of sin which we have inherited from our parents and improved through our own industry. The spiritual hammer is at work on us: the mighty tool of the blacksmith, the persistent tool of the dentist, the delicate tool of the engraver, not to mention the file and the sandpaper.

*Epée, 176*

## 20

*The World of Penitence*

With the sin of David and the adulterous kiss of Bathsheba, a new world is ushered in: the world of penitence.

Now man can cry out almost triumphantly, *Confiteor adversum me injustitiam meam Domino.* It is no small thing to have discovered good and evil!

*Emmaüs*, 237

## 21

This purity, this innocence, are not in man an inborn radiance, but the reward of a painful ascent, a conquest, the result of a long, groping collaboration with Grace.

*Apocalypse*, 197

## 22

### *Fatherly Love*

Ah, we know that between the Father and our eyes a deep look of love is possible; something may be communicated! There is freedom in this instant bond of allegiance which enables the servant to read his Master's wishes in His eyes and adjust himself accordingly, to reply to His order with an order of his own.

*Présence*, 104

## 23

### *God's Indulgence*

Take courage, then, presumptuous soul, in the thought that you have to do with a God whose mercy prevents Him from seeing clearly. The Bible teems with blind patriarchs, and doubtless it was the news of his father's dimmed vision which hastened the return of the prodigal son. For we know too well that when we rush into His arms, His eyes will be good for nothing but weeping.

*Présence*, 41

## 24

"Bring here thy finger, and see my hands; and bring here thy hand, and put it into my side." [John 20:27] Now, as in the days of the Sulamite, you may verify this opening [Canticle 5:4] and gaze on this wound which I have received in my Beloved's house. It is no longer the heavens which are torn asunder, it is God Himself who opens and who guides your hand to the very throbings of His heart.

*Présence*, 118

## 25

*God's Mercy in Purgatory*

Like an artist bent over his crucible, God bends over this flaming basin where, not satisfied with having wrought the human soul, He returns it to the flame! It is a delicate operation, partaking at once of the engineer, the gardener, and the scientist.

*Epée*, 169

## 26

Rejoice, O people in darkness! No longer will you live in the shadow of Hell but in the shadow of the Cross. He whose Law ordains that even on the Sabbath we must rescue the calf and the ass who have fallen into the cistern, He has not forgotten those who, burning or extinguished in the dense gloom, can neither find their way nor distinguish right from left.

*Epée*, 164

## 27

*The Work of Grace*

The Gospel shows it to us: the hand of God at work! It is no longer on the rock of Sinai that it carves its command-

ments, but on the living, quivering flesh of its creatures that it inscribes the propositions of love. He who fashioned man with a bit of clay is retouching His work. "The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise, the poor have the gospel preached to them." [Matt. 11:5] He touches us—and the Church humbly imitates these gestures on the eve of our second birth—on the forehead, the eyes, the ears, and the tongue; He takes us by the hand, He wraps us from head to foot in the accents of His irresistible Word. Death itself offers Him no resistance.

*Présence*, 111

## 28

He has taken on our countenance and our costume, He has been swallowed up and lost in the miserable multitude. He profits from the confusion; who would think to look for Him in this bazaar? He surrenders Himself to chance and the crowd. He knows what will come out of these collisions and these blind jostlings. And presently it is no longer He alone who notices that "power has gone forth from him." [Cf. Luke 2:43–48] The woman with the hemorrhage suddenly realizes that her wound is healed and her blood has resumed its normal flow. The child, the sinner, the scholar, all of human innocence, hidden and paralyzed under thick layers of fat, grime, and petrified habit, have been touched by an invisible electric current, by a glance, a hint, an idea, a strange hand in theirs, and they feel shifting within them that tiny grain of sand which marks the beginning of the metamorphosis of Grace.

Ah! Lord, when all other refuges are denied You, when, as You complained, there is no longer any place in the world where You may lay Your head [Cf. Matt. 8:20], there is always one place which will not fail You and where most people will not think to look for You: the human heart.

*Présence*, 112

## 29

In starting this work, the hand of God has no trouble finding a grip on us; I am not speaking of those people who are so distended, so puffed up or, as we say nowadays, so full of themselves, that one does not know where to take hold of them. Life and our own weaknesses have carved on our surface all sorts of reliefs which Providence turns to account. "My lover put his hand through the opening; my heart trembled within me, and I grew faint." [Canticle 5:4]

He has obtained a sounding; in entering us He has procured a plaster cast. He has set us out like a precious gem on a black cushion. *Tenebrae et palpation*, says Isaia in a curious passage which seems to anticipate the modern techniques of radiology and auscultation, *factae sunt super apeluncas*.

*Présence*, 113

## 30

Buried beneath this carapace, buried among the shaken foundations, perhaps we will find the living water, that water "springing up unto life everlasting" which the thirsty Saviour requested of the Samaritan woman. Water which is free-flowing, clear, and luminous, water which is grace and the element of our obedience.

*Sophie*, 167

## 31

Grace abounding beyond sin has engulfed us like an ocean. We are in it, and it is in us. We absorb it through our gills. We possess it and it possesses us. We dwell in it and it dwells in us. The Lord is within us and we are within Him. It is He who will give strength to his people; and bless them with peace. [Cf. Psalm 28:11] Hence Mary, our Mother,

whose Latin name means sea. She inhabits the ocean, and an ocean of grace is in her womb. That ocean of grace and light resides today in the narrow house, that tabernacle over the altar in which the ancient symbol is fulfilled.

*Sophie*, 173

## 32

### *The Purifying Gaze of the Lord*

O gaze of Him who is all life, to be suffered for my purgation, my torment, and my glory! Later, as our souls stand for trial, their bodies will return to join them, and the whole man will be consolidated in the Judgment.

*Art poétique*, 177

## 33

### *Felix Culpa*

Our Lord carried away in His glorified flesh the marks of the insults which His tormenters had inflicted on Him: the whip, the crown of thorns—and as for the five Wounds, we know what a source of seen and unseen splendor they have been for the saints.

Painters depict the Martyrs victoriously brandishing the instruments of their torture. And so, without wanting to strain the analogy, behold those evils, those sins and weaknesses which—alas! for our complicity—have wrought in us a mockery of the will and image of our Creator. It is the whole catalogue of human weaknesses which Our Lord has gathered at the doors of prisons and hospitals, schools, factories, in order to fill His house for the wedding. It is for this that He came into the world. It is through us and all these wretches that He won His title of Redeemer.

*Cantique*, 455

## 34

Each has his specialty, each has had his cross to bear, his instrument of shame and misery, which the Lord has miraculously turned into an instrument of correction. Nothing has been wasted. Even the slaggard, half-conscious (like that deaf and dumb person whom the Gospel tells us is so hard to reach), behold, he has emerged from his cocoon and is jumping rope with his tourniquet! At any rate, he did not sin actively. And all those people who believed they were doing evil, of what good have they not been the unconscious instruments? "Their works follow them." Yes, all their works, and not just the evil ones.

*Cantique, 455*

## 35

*The Joy of Forgiveness (A Propos of David)*

How beautiful is this world of repentance which David, with the help of Bathsheba, has just discovered! How wonderful it is to have found redemption by means of sin, to have assured oneself of love! "Happy is he whose fault is taken away, whose sin is covered." [Psalm 31:1] The Bible tells us that the concern of the Almighty extends to such humble events as the fall of a hair and the death of a sparrow. How much more so to that sin which is rightly called mortal since it causes at least the temporary death of the soul, the willful separation of the soul from its constant source.

I come to life, I open my eyes. Ah! how good it is, this air which is breathed into me. You will give me oxygen, and your Holy Spirit You will take not from me.

Fount of life, how good you are to me!

*Emmaüs, 239*

### 36

"I lift up my eyes toward the mountains, whence shall help come to me?" [Psalm 120:1] And at once the plain, the desert, the level landscape which surrounds us on all sides, is robbed of its importance. Now it is no more than a temporary carpet over which we urge our impatient feet, something no longer to be inhabited but traversed; the measure of earth which our toes no sooner gain than they hurriedly kick it behind them. It is true. There they are at last, rising before our eyes, those "timeless hills" for which we have longed from the creation of the world, and to which we feel bound by some mysterious kinship. We do not discover them, we recognize them. All has been cleansed, all is transformed around us, all is in movement. From a marshy plain, where only the obscure croaking of the frogs, a graveyard verbosity, had risen, I now hear the music of obedience, the great living language of water rushing to its inescapable duty.

*Poète*, 258

### 37

O Infinite, my heart has nothing strait enough to contain you! O Silence, if I cannot hear you yet, at least I can make out the infinite murmur of those multitudes bidding each other hush!

*Ev. Isaïe*, 97

### 38

Surrender, blessed earth, to this springtime which invades you, to this sowing which the nations round about are already demanding. And do not think that I will spare you; there is a difference between correction and contemplation. There is between us a common rhythm, as between two musicians who draw their inspiration from each other. Feel this

wound which I inflict on you, feel this cruel hand which does you good.

Open your gates, city of the soul! Desert of love!  
Garden of love which, the Canticle says, is promised to that sacred beast who browses among the lilies!

*Ev. Isaïe*, 97–98

### 39

#### *The Grace of Salvation*

Full of grace,<sup>2</sup> the guilty soul, suddenly acquitted, hears, and cannot have enough of its pardon. Where is the nation so great that it has been granted such blessings? *Pau-percula vermis Jacob!* Creature of clay, hear this unprecedented promise which still re-echoes in your awestruck womb: Blessed art thou among women.

*Cantique*, 293

### 40

#### *The Church, Instrument of Our Pardon*

It is the whole Church which the priest applies to the sin to extract its confession. I do not know how it has happened, but the evil has been drawn off. I was dead, and behold I live again.

*Ev. Isaïe*, 117

### 41

#### *The Good Thief, Classic Example of Penitence*

This day—with a single phrase he is not only absolved but sanctified! Grace, touching his repulsive exterior, has in one instant made good all the deficiencies of virtue. On this shameful gibbet it is no longer a criminal brought to justice

<sup>2</sup> This phrase may apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the soul which has received a full pardon for its sins: all heaven admires its beauty.—*Trans.*

that we see, it is a martyr, a sacrificial offering that shines forth. The murderer, the fornicator, the thief, the convict, the professional bandit, has become a saint. The fundamental acceptance was enough. It was enough, this imperceptible shift, this tiny chink in the watertight reservoir of our egoism. One look from beneath those bloodied eyelids was enough to release a cataclysm of repentance, a resurrection mingled with the death agony, an irresistible explosion of Eternity.

"This day, thou shalt be with me in paradise." [Luke 23:43] It is done. Thus the prophecy that "the Publicans . . . are entering the kingdom of God before you" [Matt. 21:31] has been fulfilled to the letter.

*Poète*, 114

## 42

### *The Rebirth of the Soul*

The soul trembles with astonishment. What, is this really me? "Who is this that comes forth like the dawn?" [Canticle 6:10] The prophet had foretold it: then shalt thou marvel and come in great numbers!

What is taking place in her is at once the answer, in the night of unexpected battalions, to the cheer of the legions of light; it is also the bridal emotion of those forces surrendering to the sweetness of these honeyed syllables, "The bridegroom comes."

*Cantique*, 292

## 43

### *Expansion of the Purified Soul*

I breathe God, and God in turn breathes me. He inhales me wholly and profoundly, and He knows what I make of this breath which endlessly makes me. I am one of this world of souls which He inhales all together and with which He endlessly enjoys blessed intercourse.

*Cantique*, 294

**44***The Garment of Innocence*

The white gown is our garment of baptism, but it is also that of martyrdom and of penitence. . . . Someone in Voltaire's time understood that injunction, "at all times [to] let your garments be white." [Eccles. 9:8] It was St. Benedict-Joseph Labre; also, the daughters of Louis XV who are buried at Carmel.

*Apocalypse*, 300–301

**45**

Alas! This white garment, which of us can boast that he has not soiled it? But we may wash it in the blood of the Lamb. *Sanguis Domini nostri Jesu Christi*, murmurs the priest sadly and tenderly as he gives us absolution.

*Apocalypse*, 302

**46***The Whiteness of Innocence*

Whiteness is our way of saying Yes to whatever light there may be. It is the blankness of this open page on which God is free to write whatever He pleases. The infant in his baptismal gown, the old fellow who goes into the confessional to put on a clean shirt, the priest preparing for Mass, the girl at her first communion, the bride under her veils, the deceased under the solemn pall, each is like a blank book whose ineffaceable title page is enough. *In capite librum scriptum est de me*. It is not we who are white: it is Christ in whom we are clothed. "Yearning to be clothed over," writes St. Paul, "with that dwelling of ours which is from heaven." "I have taken off my robe," says the Bride of the Canticle, "am I then to put it on?" This is the business of Grace, O penitent soul.

*Apocalypse*, 299

**47***The Baptismal Robe*

It is written that the hosts who follow Christ in heaven on those white horses, which represent the Gospels, are arrayed in fine linen, white and pure. This is the baptismal garment in which St. Paul tells us we are "clothed over," the baptismal water which has become a supple fabric adjusted to our form, the beam of light which has come to cover us and to glorify our souls.

*Emmaüs, 225***48***Function of the Baptismal Waters*

It is once and for all that we have been baptized, and those waters in which we have been immersed will always be a part of us. For those waters over which the Holy Spirit once stirred are no longer a meaningless or untamed body; they have taken on meaning and direction. If they do not actually know what they are doing, at least they are aware that there is someone who knows it for them, who is with them and one with their flow. They are conscious of their power and their mission, for all the enterprises in the creation are yoked to them; they will not fail Niagara, that formidable staircase which summons them!

*Epée, 51***49**

We know them, these living waters; they are the waters of baptism and grace, which the centurion with the head of his lance caused to flow from between the ribs of the divine Victim. And should we forget them, the Samaritan woman would be there to refresh our memory.

*Epée, 55*

## 50

*The Water of Salvation*

See how it spreads out, how it surrounds, how it embraces, how it examines, how it yields, how it alternately divides and comes together and adapts its course to all changes, how it profits from the tiniest fissure and sluice to work its way in, and finally how, living, mobile, and supple, it expands, fills, invades, gains, bathes, sounds, overcomes, breaks down, drains, possesses, unlocks, and releases, and in the midst of gravity, introduces suspension. This is why God chose water as the sacramental element of that baptism which not only cleanses us but is a source of profound transformation. It is the transparent and unseen vehicle of that Wisdom of which it is written, "But whence can wisdom be obtained, and where is the place of understanding?" [Job 28:12] It is that secret sap which seeks out all elements capable of fashioning in a single body a child of God.

*Poète*, 123

## 51

"We went through fire and water," says the Psalmist. [65:12] The fire was necessary to bring forth the water, that spiritual water, the fruit of baptism, "springing up unto life everlasting."

*Epée*, 177

## 52

*We Are Transformed by Baptism*

Baptism turns our water into wine, and our wine into radiance. We are become the children of that furnace fired by the flame of Truth.

*Cantique*, 502

## 53

*Christ, Ransom for Our Sins*

"And I found delight in the sons of men." [Prov. 8:31] But we too, my God, find delight in You! "Who shall feast in the kingdom of God?" [Luke 14:15] And we want none of Your ways of being with us to deprive us of any of the others. It is not enough for us to feast our eyes on that radiant flesh You received from Your mother, that unique flowering of a twice-blessed blood. Straw is no more eager for the flame than we, driven by our sins, to partake of your flesh!

Blessed be the sin which made all this possible! Blessed be the unbearable enormity of our guilt which straightway earned us that opening in Your side!

Is this what you expected, old Devil? You wanted to throw Him off His throne, but this was not enough for Him. Behold, He has come to meet you, He has placed Himself in your hands. Take Him, kill Him, tear Him apart, He is a bag of grapes beneath your feet. Go on, the time has come for you to go to work on Him with all four feet; let the Godhead gush forth, let our Testament gush forth, in that great, dread cry of Good Friday, in that final unleashing of the great sacramental Waters! There you are, chained forever to the *machina Christi*. Now, bend the knee! Serve! There is no longer a sin in the world which must not serve our redemption.

*Ev. Isaie, 256*

## 54

*Jesus and John the Baptist*

Jesus brings the water, but it is John who brings the desert. It is Jesus who brings Grace, but John who makes us thirsty for it.

*Cantique, 360*

## 55

*The Bitterness of Our Sins*

The gall that cures Tobias is the Passion of Christ. He declines the bitterness of sin that we carry to our lips, but that bitterness of the inner spirit and of remorse, that slow distillation of an inexhaustible and corrosive grief, that golden dram which has the power to cleanse and clarify our inner landscape, is His gift to us.

*Sophie*, 113

## 56

*Our Lord and Sin*

Numbness, swelling, contraction, decay, disfigurement: these are the symptoms of that physical leprosy for which the reading of our charming contemporary fiction provides us with ample moral equivalents. Lepers make up a considerable portion of Our Lord's clientele. The curé of Ars, at the confessional, experienced that suffocating odor of mortal sin. What of the ordeal inflicted for thirty years on those sacred nostrils?

*Ruth*, 80

## 57

*Sacramental Grace*

When from time to time I present myself at Your confessional, it is not with warm water that I ask to be cleansed but with Your blood. *Sanguis Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*, mumbles the priest. He mumbles, but this does not prevent it from being blood, the real thing, the very blood released by the centurion!

*Seigneur*, 107

## 58

Anne-Catherine Emmerich tells us that of all the Saviour's agonies at Gethsemane, the bitterest, the most poignant, was the realization of His powerlessness in the face of the hardened sinner, His impotence before Judas, and in the eyes of those countless multitudes for whom nothing had happened and Jesus Christ had come in vain. It is this spiritual spectacle which the cross on Calvary translates and transforms into a physical torture, the fearful rack of love in the grips of an insuperable resistance.

*Poète*, 259

## 59

*The Humiliations of the Redeemer*

What metaphor could more appropriately describe the Word that took on sin and corruption in its final humiliation than the worm. "But I am a worm," cries the Psalmist, "not a man!" [Psalm 21:7] This is what God chose to take and "make great above all things" [Psalm 137:2], that we might see entwined on the cross in a single calligram the roots of our error and of our salvation.

Behold the Tree which the Kingdom of Heaven has brought forth for our amazement from that grain of mustard seed mentioned in the Gospel, so small that it is "the smallest of all the seeds" [Matt. 13:31-2], so small that it entirely escapes our notice. This is the seed which has become this enormous Tree.<sup>3</sup>

*Poète*, 239

\* The Church.

## 60

### *The Role of Mary*

It is she, the lily among thorns, it is she, who out of this hostile and tangled and impenetrable thicket which was mankind, out of this soil which seemed capable of germinating nothing but resistance, criticism, dissension, and venom, has wrought this wondering welcome. She has prevailed through the contagion of an irresistible sweetness; it is she, this softness and submission, this conquest, this sense of security, this blossoming of our good will, who spreads within us like a dawning. For it is she who has made us, it is she who holds the keys to all the secrets of our flesh!

*Cantique, 296*

## 61

Unless unseen, unless annihilated, unless I came by a path of shadows, asks Mary, how could I arrive at the darkness and rebellion that lies stored in man's heart? What, Lord! To lend a little of that grace of which I am full to this monstrous and misshapen chaos, must I pretend to forget Your very name? Must I re-create out of this filth and corruption, out of these criminals and hard hearts, the mouth You offered to Judas? At what cost must I plant in the depth of this stone and this fat and this pus the seed of innocence and dread which only death and the trumpet of our impending dissolution have the power to bring to fruition?

"The fire on the altar is to be kept burning; it must not go out." [Lev. 6:5] Yes, beyond the dung hill is that smoke-dream which is confounded with the stench of corruption! And yet who knows but that under the breath of the Spirit this noisome reek may not become coal and flame? For I am the mother of the Beloved. "Can a man take fire to his

bosom, and his garments not be burned?" Who can say just how far the frontiers of the invisible Church extend?

*Rose*, 94

## 62

### *Mary and Her Stubborn Children*

It is not only the good who need me. It is not only Catherine Labouré, the humble cook who kneels at my side, her arms stretched out on my lap as on a prayer stool. There are all these idle creatures whom I must muster for inspection, all those for whom God died in vain—still, they are my children, she says—all those ways of not seeing and not hearing, of not acting and not loving! Through all this I must wade; I must plunge my arms into this chaos of primeval matter until the end of time. "Show yourself to be a mother." So I would, Lord, I ask no more, but they will not have me! They offer me their eternal denial; it is only in hell that I can bring all this into the world! Thus is fulfilled the prophecy of Simeon: "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted." [Luke 2:34]

Where may this sign be driven, now and forever, but into the heart of His mother, of her who is responsible for His humanity?

*Epée*, 248

## 63

Which is the one who, whether we will or not, gradually unlocks our eyelids with her rose-fresh fingers?

*Cantique*, 292

# The Resurrection of the Body

*Notre tour viendra bientôt d'être rassemblés dans votre grange et dans  
votre aire.*

*Quand le gloire du Dieu vivant éclatera comme un coup de tonnerre.*  
*Odes, 193*

BEFORE proceeding to the two final articles of the Credo, let us briefly review the foregoing articles as a whole. It cannot be denied that Claudel's faith is in complete agreement with the Catholic dogma which lends it its solid foundation.

If one wished to characterize Claudel's religious doctrine, one

might say that it is essentially *Christological*, for indeed, Christ figures in it as an eternal presence, always in His role of Redeemer. A second feature of his spirituality is the central importance of Mary. There could be nothing warmer, more natural, or more moving than the intense devotion sworn by the poet to the *immaculate*

Mother of the Saviour. Christ-centered, Mary-centered, Claudel's thinking is also, as we have pointed out, profoundly Church-centered. It would be difficult to find a lay author as respectful of the priority of the Church in the field of faith and morality.

We can add a fourth characteristic, even rarer in men of letters: the eschatological aspect. A rare quality, it will be easily recognized in spite of the novelty of the term, which is seldom used in modern speech: it means everything that pertains to the final end of man. In general we prefer not to broach this subject of death and its consequences except pejoratively, to emphasize with wry irony its gruesome, truly grotesque, aspects.

But this is not Claudel's attitude toward death, even in a work he called *La Danse des Morts* in which he has brought out effectively both the misery and grandeur of humanity: "Remember that you are dust," and "Remember that you are rock."

In his apologetic writings, there are innumerable passages dealing with the future life. Indeed it is even easy to ascertain to what extent, as the years began to weigh on his shoulders, he was pursued (I do not say "haunted") by the thought of those "first timid steps beyond the flesh." For let us state at once that in spite of that "horrible dread" which he acknowledges on one occasion, and which

is the natural reflex of the average man, Claudel has voiced much oftener his intense desire to reach his blessed home.

His work as a whole may be said to be implicitly, if not explicitly, directed toward the hereafter. What counts for Claudel is not this transitory world, but the one where we will live without the shadow of change, in the pure vision of God; where we will be, in a phrase which is dear to him, "with the Cause." No more second causes, deficient, limited, uncertain, as here below, but the sole Cause of everything: the Almighty Lord.

On every page one can feel Claudel's soul inspired by the same longing felt by the first Christians for the divine Parousia, when the glorified Christ was to appear as the triumphant Leader of the Universe, gathering His myriad faithful sheep under His crook and inviting them to the wedding feast.

One has only to read the sublime pages of *Présence et Prophétie* to be immediately convinced of the intensity of this concentration on Paradise which gives rise to an endless declaration of faith. There would be little point in a profound devotion to the Passion of Christ and to the Blessed Virgin, or in a full and joyous communion with all one's brothers on earth and in heaven, did not all this ultimately result in the great apotheosis of the heavenly wed-

ding of the Redeemer and His Church, as it has been described to us in the pages of the Apocalypse. It is from this belief in the future life that Claudel's thinking draws its irresistible force of hope.

What does the Church mean when it asks us to adhere to the twofold dogma of the resurrection of the flesh and life everlasting? Will our lot in the Hereafter consist, as the poet humorously describes it, in savoring "tarts as big as wagon wheels and wine by the jeroboam?" (*Cantique*, 191) The pleasures awaiting us there are of an altogether different nature, although they may be conferred on the body as well as on the soul.

Let us review the teaching of the Church: All the bodies of all men who have ever lived will be resurrected, those of the good to blessed life, those of the sinners to eternal damnation. This dogma is based on the resurrection of Christ, our Leader and Prototype. "Just as Christ has arisen from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life." [Rom. 6:4] When we speak of resurrection, we are speaking of the flesh, for the soul, being immortal, has no need of resurrection. It will continue to live until its reunion with the body.

"Nothing that we possess here below will be destroyed, with the exception of our defects. But all

will be restored and exalted to the highest degree, not only restored but illuminated." (*Poète*, 169)

The body, which will have been the instrument of our sanctification, will be rewarded along with the soul, in fact its bliss will augment that of the soul. "For this corruptible body must put on incorruption," says St. Paul [I Cor. 15:53], and it is in this body that we will see God. [Job 19:26]

Our bodies will be endowed at last with four properties peculiar to glorified bodies: *Impassibility*, or immunity to all evil, infirmity, or pain; *Agility*, or ease of movement; *Subtlety*, or the ability to penetrate and dominate all things; *Light*, or *Glory*, luminous radiance similar to that of Christ at the Transfiguration, according to that dazzling promise of the Epistle to the Philippians: "We eagerly await a Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will refashion the body of our lowliness, conforming it to the body of his glory." [Phil. 3:20-21]

What an inspiring theme for a writer like Claudel! And how readily his pen catches fire to expand it, though always guided by the wise doctrine of the Divine Teacher! He speaks ecstatically of that "new tunic," our garment of glory, which will replace this "squalid rag" which is unworthy "to clothe a child of God." (*Epée*, 150) "This flick of the nail" will suffice to "split our pod from top to

bottom" (*Ibid.*, 149), and to prepare us when the time comes to don the gorgeous robe which is waiting for us.

## 1

This flick of the nail which will split our pod from top to bottom . . .

*Epée*, 149

## 2

Hear, dust! Listen, ashes! God, who knows the number of His stars and is mindful of each of His sparrows, has not forgotten you on the funeral slab!

*Epée*, 165

## 3

Our material body yellows and withers until the seed of immortality is ready.

*Epée*, 157

## 4

Your judgments are an unfathomable abyss. (*Judicia tua abyssus multa.*) In this abyss each creature, according to his destiny, comes to take his place of honor or punition.

*Toi*, 66

## 5

### *The Summons*

All that is raised like a vast field under the plow, and all these dead—the living dead as well, sinners who are being converted—hurriedly get back into their ribs and their limbs,

and under the feet of the last warriors of Armageddon—the giants who are roused from the polished stone and the shivered rock. *Ros lucis, ros tuus.* Behold, their foreheads have been touched by this dram of light, this initial of the resurrection, this limpid drop on the tip of Lazarus' finger for which the rich man of the Gospel dies of envy.

*Ev. Isaie, 95*

## 6

### *Universal Dressing*

On that day it is not only the dead who will reassume their form and flesh in the fullness and justification of their *raison d'être*; it is the Father Himself who is pontifically arrayed in the raiment of all His children. The day is come once and for all when death has been swallowed up in victory. No longer are all these individual wills held together as if with intersecting lines and all sorts of juggling in the right places; now it is a living pattern which we complete and color as the finished work completes the rough draft; it is a living design which we have embraced. What we have here is the Incarnation of Christ within us. "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God." [Gal. 2:20] This body which we have inherited through a series of intersecting accidents is now rightfully ours through grace; we have borrowed it directly from the Source! Now we translate our Author on sight! Now they are realized at last, this city, these filial frontiers which only we were capable of offering to the Uncircumscribed!

*Ev. Isaie, 95*

## 7

### *Necessary Separation of the Soul and the Mortal Body*

In this moment of essential recognition, the soul no longer has any use for this soiled garment, this counterfeit

image which daily living has led her to make of her body until it was time to produce, with eye and mind fixed on the Creator, that "new tunic" which will replace the one we made for ourselves, in ignorance and sin, when at the mercy of all the second causes. The soul therefore surrenders her old tunic to the elements while waiting to be reclothed in that new and innocent garment which He has promised. For this squalid rag is unworthy to clothe a child of God. "Broken was the snare, and we were freed." [Psalm 123:7]

*Epée*, 150

## 8

### *The Seed of Immortality in Us*

The sinful flesh is at the mercy of decay, but we carry within us the sublime blueprint of our immortality.

*Cantique*, 366

## 9

### *The Fittingness of the Resurrection of the Flesh*

Is it right that this body which was the product, the expression, and the instrument of the soul which gave it birth, form, and movement, should be abandoned henceforth to dissolution and nothingness, tossed aside like a rag, or a cocoon from which the insect has disengaged itself? Is it possible to accept the idea that this clay, molded and formed by the personality of which, in God's design, it was an essential and inseparable part, can be discarded without there remaining from its obligatory term of service some impression and some influence, some aptitude, like the remembrance which clings to a souvenir? The Bible even suggests that there remains a capacity for growth. "The earth is changed as is clay by the seal, and dyed as though it were a garment." [Job 38:14]

*Epée*, 150

**10***Hope*

"The bones of Joseph," says the Preacher, "were searched, and after death they prophesied." Thus the elemental stone in us reabsorbs the flesh, but no matter how far our remains may advance in the novitiate of the dust, they do not escape that record which their Creator keeps of them; they harbor a promise of resurrection, for in the words of Psalm 15, "my body too abides in confidence." [Cf. also Acts 2:26]

*Poète*, 217

**11**

"I know that my Vindicator lives!" [Job 19:25] This is the cry, echoing down the ages, which issued from the tormented throat of the old Job. This same hope is rooted in my bowels, for I know my Redeemer lives! He is there, He is present, He is already with us in the form of faith and hope in the womb of the living Eve and of all women after her to whom she has transmitted her heartbeat. In the arms of his own wife, the patriarch arouses and embraces that promise in which all successive generations have been born.

*Accompagnements*, 140

**12***The Body of Christ, the Christian's Shield*

While he is alive—that is, possessed of a soul and a body—the sinner can always be utterly reconciled with Christ through penitence and faith. The man who dies in a state of sin loses this body which he possessed in common with Christ, this refuge which has sheltered him since Eden, and he is no

longer in a position to give it to Him. Henceforth he has only a soul, a soul which henceforth sees clearly, and which, therefore, can no longer gain merit. It is indeed true that after the final resurrection, the souls recover their bodies, but they are no longer opaque bodies.

“Naked before him is the nether world, and Abaddon has no covering.” [Job 26:6]

*Toi*, 64

## 13

### *Union with Christ, Pledge of Resurrection*

Man in a state of innocence was bound to God by what the theologians call *fides oculata*. Redeemed man is united with God through Christ, and with Christ through baptism by faith. Christ died for us and henceforth we die with Christ. What was punishment becomes through Him expiation and redemption. And as He is risen, so shall we rise.

*Toi*, 64

## 14

### *Our Communion with Christ*

“My food is to do the will of Him who sent me” [John 4:34], says the Saviour. Ours is to do the will of Christ. And it is not only in this world but in the next that we will take communion, that we will fully comprehend, not only with our spirit but with our flesh, on behalf of our flesh and our spirit and our fully realized being, that His body is indeed food, and that His blood is indeed drink. From the birth of Christianity, do we not find numerous examples of saintly men and women whose sole nourishment has been the word of God and the sacramental elements?

*Emmaüs*, 134

## 15

*Negative Imprint of Christ on the Damned*

Brought face to face with God, we will submit both our cause and the distortion we are producing—our cause and the violence we do it—to a merciless examination. The damned soul will come to know what it means to produce this abortive and counterfeit image, to bear the ineffaceable brand of blasphemy. There is in him a desire to be God, which he can neither realize nor destroy. “I have brought out fire from your midst which will devour you.” [Ezechiel 28:18]

Every man who does not die in Christ and in communion with Christ, dies in his own image. Henceforth he is powerless to remove this seal of selfhood which every moment of his life has helped to imprint in the eternal substance. So long as the word has not been completed, the hand can go back and erase it with the cross. But once finished, it is ineffaceable, as indestructible as the matter which received it.  
*Quod scripsi, scripsi.*

*Toi, 65*

## 16

*The Body Will Not Be Lost*

“The very hairs of your head are all numbered” [Matt. 10:30], says the Gospel. Job tells us that there is a hope of resurrection lodged in his bones, part of their substance, a hope which he would like to cut in the rock forever [cf. 19:24] and what rock could be more fundamental than that on which he himself has been framed? “Nor was my frame unknown to you when I was made in secret,” says the Psalmist. [38:15] And again, “He watches over all his bones.” [Ps. 33:21] Isaia adds, “He will renew your strength, and you shall be like a watered garden.” [Isa. 58:11]

*Epée, 151*

**17***Transformation*

Nothing that we possess here below will be destroyed, with the exception of our defects, but all will be restored and exalted to the highest degree, not only restored but illuminated, as it were, transported from the realm of empirical proof to the realm of intuitive understanding.

*Poète*, 169

**18***The Testimony of Blood*

The Bible tells us in many passages that the blood shed by the innocent—the blood of Abel, of the martyrs—is not a passive substance; it bears witness, it will not be silent, it cries out. For blood, that element sprung from the rock, is the vehicle of the soul, the matter of this sacrament of our unity, and St. John tells us that like water and spirit, it is imbued with a testimonial quality. From the first chapters of Genesis, God solemnly declares to Abraham, “Surely I will require an account of your life’s blood; from every beast I will require it, and from man; from every man I will require the life of his fellow. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God man was made.” [9:5–6] A very important passage, because it indicates that in the perfect realization of this image, the corporeal substance plays an indispensable role.

*Epée*, 151

**19***Our Body Will Be a Spiritual Body*

It is written that our bodies will be glorified. They will not be glorified in the way in which, today on earth, we honor

saints' relics. To be sure, it is fitting and proper that we should venerate all that has aided those august persons to be such beautiful images of God, to radiate the grace and will of God, and we are rewarded for our faith by the beneficence which still emanates from these blessed remains. But after all, today it is no longer the femur or the clavicle of a given saint that helps him to come before God fully realized as Ignatius or Clara; it is no longer the wounded heart of Saint Thérèse, as it is preserved in Spain, which determines, in the presence of her Spouse, the throbbing of that seraph.

*Emmaüs*, 133

## 20

### *We Cannot Say What It Will Be*

Theologians have formulated ideas regarding the future state which will be ours, since Jesus is but the first born among the dead. Impassible, agile, subtle, and glorified: such, according to St. Paul, will be these heavenly bodies into which our earthly bodies will be transformed. We are told that basically they will be the same, but the scholars do not hesitate to endow them with properties contradictory to those that condition their present existence.

Does this worry us, is it a cause for alarm? And when, in addition, people ask us where we will be, and in what place these extraordinary creatures we will have become are to take their pleasure, this is just the question we were waiting for and in answer to which we were holding in readiness a triumphal burst of laughter.

For before He left us, Jesus made the promise which is all in all: "Where I am, there also shall my servant be." Indeed this is all we ask. He who created what we call Time and Space will be at no loss to find whatever ways He pleases of being with us.

For we are the present owners of these bodies which we need in order to make the most of this world which has

been offered to our understanding. But if Jesus requires it, He need only ask, and we will have no trouble producing just the bodies we need to be with Him.

*Emmaüs*, 132

## 21

### *We Will Retain Our Faculties*

All of Scripture, all that we have of the revelation of the Saints, shows us souls continuing to live in God's presence with the full possession of their faculties. Their being is not then changed as here below it would be, just as the body is changed by the loss of more than one limb. (Thus the addition or subtraction of a single molecule suffices to alter the identity of a chemical composition.) But there is no such interruption in our souls and, as we are told in the Apocalypse, our works follow us. We carry away with us the faculties which have been responsible for them. They are the fulcrum for judgment and sanction. Our total humanity will not be too much with which to love and understand God, to realize ourselves in that irreplaceable individuality which has been the delight of the Creator.

It will be objected: but how can we see without eyes, and how can we hear without ears? God and the Angels have no eyes or ears, and yet I do not imagine they are thereby prevented from seeing and hearing! Now we see and hear imperfectly in the world of effects, but they see and hear in the world of Cause. And we who in the next world will have embraced the Will of God, in whom all things consist and subsist, we shall see and hear, and we shall taste and feel, in the world of Cause. In every creature, in every object, we will be aware of that God who at that very instant is in the act of creating it, and creating it with its own co-operation. We will be One with God the Creator.

*Emmaüs*, 210

## 22

No Christian will deny that after death we are permitted to see God. Is this not enough? In seeing God, do we not see all the rest? "Shall he who shaped the ear not hear? or he who formed the eye not see?" [Psalm 93:9] We take with us into the next world our whole self, that whole soul whose business it is to fashion the body. We can have complete confidence in God who, if He created the soul indestructible, must have done so because He will never cease to need it. Far from being impaired, it will be purified, glorified. Ah, the whole Creation will not be too wide, Eternity will not be too long for us to tell Him all that we still have to tell Him and explain. Who knows? Perhaps He would remain forever ignorant were we not forever there to explain to Him.

*Emmaüs*, 131

## 23

The position of the divided soul is not so unfortunate as you think, according to Thomism. Reread those sublime pages devoted to the deific vision in which the creature acquires something of God's own powers in order to plumb His depths by a process somewhat analogous to the *συνωγεία* of Plato.

The famous story of the rich man in the Gospel indicates in no uncertain terms that the divided soul retains memory and even sensibility and that it gains, moreover, a power of vision which no longer has any physical limitations. The text of St. Luke contains a rather surprising remark on the separation of the two lives: "Between us and you a great gulf is fixed" [16:26], which recalls the first verses of Genesis. The separation goes right to the very roots of the Creation; it precedes the mystery of the firmament. With regard to the resurrection of the body, the teaching of the Church, or rather

its formulation, is not complete; but most of the elements are there, like stones on a block, some of which are already cut.

*Unpublished letter to Paul Valéry,  
Copenhagen, November 13, 1919*

## 24

### *The Four Properties of Glorified Bodies*

**IMPASSIBILITY:** The term impassibility does not mean that henceforth we will be insensible to the signs and means of an outward and physical movement toward us, but only that sensation will no longer be forced on us, that we will retain full freedom in the bosom of love and law, that henceforth nothing will be offered to us in regard to which we have not stored up an inexhaustible potentiality for harmony and adjustment, for brotherhood. Everywhere we go we will carry with us the prerogative of creation, and our contact with effects will be replaced by a radiant communion with causes; not so much impassibility, as the extension of "self-administration" to our whole person, as the performance and enjoyment of sympathy, of the unending duty which embraces the law, and of the verb which is one with the clause.

*Poète*, 169

## 25

**SUBTLETY:** The property of subtlety is the transposition into the physical realm of that searching and insinuating spiritual quality of discernment which no surface or obstacle can resist, whose strength and persistence are unparalleled, according to this passage from the Book of Wisdom: "For in her is a spirit intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, agile, clear, unstained, certain, not baneful, loving the good, keen, unhampered, beneficent." [7:22]

It is owing to this quality that the glorified soul, now

protected from intrusion from without, becomes absolute mistress of her internal and instrumental domain. It is thanks to this property that the risen Christ was able to appear before His disciples at a moment's notice, "though the doors had been closed"; it is thanks to this that so many saints, even in this world, were given the power to "lay down their bodies and to take them up again," to dispose of them according to their charity, that is, their own style of outward manifestation, whether perceptible or no, as the occasion and their love may direct them.

Everything that is born must give way before this bearer of the Word. "Lift up, O gates, your lintels!" cries the Psalmist. [23:7] And Ezechiel: "The glory of the Lord entered the temple by way of the gate." [43:4] He availed Himself of this inner vacuum, of this universal weakness in the presence of the perfect Being.

Light passes through everything, as has been demonstrated by the recent discovery of those exploratory waves of matter. Well, the risen being will be clothed in light, "robed in light as with a cloak," in the words of the Psalm [103:2], and not only in light, but in all its properties of awareness and intelligence. *Vestimento* does not mean the assumption of something external or irrelevant, but a mantle which is closely and intimately related to that source which is in each of us, according to St. Paul: "We do not wish to be unclothed but rather clothed over." [II Cor. 5:4] We will be clothed with grace, with that irresistible splendor which nothing can impede because it is utterly devoted to the service of God, according to the prophet Ezechiel: "I . . . anointed you with oil. I clothed you with an embroidered gown." [16:9-10]

*Poète*, 170

## 26

Long enough the body has imposed on the spirit the bonds of weight, finitude, and possibility. Long enough we

have plotted against it, and now the time has come for the body to learn the meaning of obedience. What was a prison has become an engine. What was a carapace has become pure power, conquest, and vitality. What was opacity has become, informed by the spirit, a pure vehicle of intelligence and intelligibility. "O Death, where is thy victory?" Ancient obstacle, where is your resistance?

We have embraced the Cause, no longer need we dwell on the effects. We have embraced the Spirit which is "all embracing, and know man's utterance"; no longer need we be confined by anything save the necessities of music. No longer can any creature stand in our way, we are in the creation with its Creator. The divine adoption, whereby we have become children of God, has invested even material elements with an irresistible superiority of subtlety and penetration.

*Rose, 199*

## 27

**AGILITY:** Just as the property of subtlety represents a triumph over inert matter, the property of agility represents an indifference to space and distance. The magnificent passage from the Book of Wisdom which we started to quote just now continues: "For Wisdom is mobile beyond all motion, and she penetrates and pervades all things by reason of her purity. For she is an aura of the might of God and a pure effusion of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nought that is sullied enters into her. For she is the fulgurance of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of his goodness." [7:24-25]

*Poète, 179*

## 28

Agility is that endowment which enables the individual to realize himself anywhere at will (as if there were anything

in him but God's will), that is, instantly to assume a certain outward form in the scheme of things, in an ever-fresh harmonic and melodic relationship with this scheme, a relationship begotten of the endless necessities of love. Distance for him is no longer a separation or a removal, but what in the language of music is called an interval. In praising God, he passes over all of paradise with a marvelous sonority, as the bow passes over the string; and it is impossible to tell if he is singing, or if everything is vibrating in his wake. And as there is an agility in space (if the term is applicable to this spiritual order), so too there will be an agility in time, so that the individual, thanks to this deliberate acceleration or retardation—of which stellar rays give us some experience—will become part of the infinite variety of causes and effects of which he was the invisible and universal center.

*Poète*, 179

## 29

**GLORY (*Inner Light*):** The first three endowments which we have just examined are primarily concerned with the relation of the risen being to what is outside himself. But the fourth, glory, is more intimately related to his intrinsic makeup. In the Bible, it is most frequently compared to a garment: "gown of glory," "robed in light, as with a cloak." It is the seamless robe, *inconsutile*, which was worn by Christ. It is an untearable mantle, a principle of unity which gathers all the virtues under a single head.

"The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard," says Isaia. [58:8] And this principle, as we know, is the fire which breaks forth and feeds on all substances and combines all that it seizes into a single tongue of clear flame. *Clarifica Me*, Clarify Me, is the prayer of Our Lord at the Last Supper. Now, there is inner clarity and outer clarity. Inner clarity, or inner light, is that of the conscience which is alluded to in that passage in Matthew and Luke: "The lamp of the body is the

eye. If thy eye be sound, thy whole body will be full of light." [Matt.6:22; Luke 11:34] But in the life to come our eye is "sound" because it sees only one thing, its first cause, and this single vision kindles throughout the individual being a participation in a single knowledge and a single desire.

*Poète*, 172

## 30

**GLORY (*Outer Light*):** The outer light is the clarification of its own nature which our own soul provides by shining outwardly, like a metal under the blowpipe, and also the light it sheds on the surrounding context, like a letter in a word. This light which proceeds from each of us, albeit kindled at a single source is, insofar as it represents individual testimony, of infinite variety. This is why the Bible compares the righteous to the stars without number, which differ from one another in size and quality and which God nevertheless knows and calls like sheep, each by its own name.

*Poète*, 173

# And Life Everlasting

*Voici Jérusalem qui est construite comme une cité!*

*Voici la vision de la paix où toutes les larmes sont essuyées.*

*Odes*, 198

“IT WOULD be a great temptation for me to dwell on those prospects of the future life which the continual meditation of a long life has afforded me.” So writes the octogenarian poet after long and profound reflection on a subject worthy of his mind. Beyond the finite creation he sees divine infinity; beyond time he surveys

eternity. Naturally, Claudel is well aware that his human vision is limited, and that no man knows “what things God has prepared for those who love him.” He remains humbly on the brink of the unfathomable abyss which is the mystery of the Beyond, but his faith and his hope, illumined by prayer and the reading of the Holy

Scriptures, have already shown him splendors in which he dreams of losing himself.

What do we mean by Life Everlasting? It is the joy without end resulting from our possession of the very life of God. The Bible refers to it by various names: Kingdom of Heaven, Heaven, Paradise, New Jerusalem, My Father's House.

What is the nature of this life? Christ has told us in the Gospel: "Now this is everlasting life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ." [John 17:3] This knowledge will be total, not fragmentary or superficial as is our earthly knowledge of things; it will be a veritable possession of the Truth which is God, and a participation in His divine life. "We will be like gods," because we will see God in His very essence. The glorious light in which He will clothe us will enable us to know Him as He is.

We will also know the merits and the splendor of our fellow-elect, the saints, and the blessed Virgin Mary. We will be able to communicate with them directly, by a mere glance, a mere touch: their joy will augment our own, and no fear of loss will overshadow it. We will automatically be rendered immune to all ills, spiritual or physical. It will be beatitude total and without end.

Utterly united with Christ, its Head, we will realize the won-

drous harmony of the mystic Body, as well as our brotherhood with it, *in sinu Patris*. Thanks to Him, Claudel tells us, we have "a draft from God, signed with the blood of Jesus Christ." (*Toi*, 29)

The first condition of our admittance into heaven will naturally be to have undergone the bodily death and all the struggles that it presupposes. No earthly body is received in heaven. We must have cast it off, "layer by layer, as the insect frees itself of its chrysalis." (*Epée*, 187) All infirmities will be healed, only the martyrs will retain on their glorified bodies the stigmata of their victory. As for those who have not had to shed their blood for Christ, they must have paid all their debts as a prerequisite for admission. No one enters into the House of the Father who does not wear the bridal gown of innocence, whether preserved or regained. But then there will be "immersion in the joy divine . . . the inexorable sea which lifts, floods, and submerges all." (*Poète*, 229)

And then shall the soul cry, "O Infinite! There is nothing in my heart strait enough to contain you!" (*Isaïe*, 96) *Erimus sicut dei!* We will be like gods, "having embraced our Cause." There will be not one of the divine motions "in which we do not participate." (*Poète*, 163) "We will share in each of the creative acts of God, and feel its effect on our very substance." (*Ibid.*) "Then I shall

know even as I have been known.” [I Cor. 13:12]

“What is human love with its most ardent delights,” asks Claudel, “in comparison with this divine ravishment, like lime seizing sand, and what death . . . grants so fatherly and so loving a gift?” (*Art poétique*, 181) “Beatific union, that great sacrament of the wedding of God and His Church, of which marriage is the fruitful and sacred image.” (*Sophie*, 89)

“Our ear will be pressed to the heart of God . . . we will be with the Love that invites all things to itself. . . . we will embrace every divine gesture with a pure intelligence and a swift and subtle will.” (*Poète*, 164)

“In the sight of God, I will be all flame!” cries the poet in a burst of lyricism, “I will awaken in the fullness of my name.” (*Emmaüs*, 134)

Commenting for a bereaved mother on St. Gregory’s book, *De vitro et auro*, Claudel celebrates the transparency of the souls of the blessed which will enable us to “absorb them in a single glance” and to admire their golden splendor. (*Contacts*, 48)

This splendor will be that of divine charity, *diffusa in cordibus nostris*, that theological virtue which will continue to exist in eternity, while faith and hope will fall away of their own accord. Divine love will kindle praise in the hearts of all the blessed. Not one

will be able to escape this sublime chorus in honor of the blessed Trinity. Each “will himself become a harp,” writes the poet: “O arpeggio! O true and mighty commandment! O endeavor supported by weight!” (*Poète*, 168) But this harp plays in concert with all the others, “all are necessary” to swell this numberless chorus in which the blessed Virgin, seraphs and Archangels sing.

However lofty the poet’s flights, he knows that they are mere stammerings compared with what awaits us in the heavenly kingdom, and in his heart he feels only a great longing to be there. What could be more moving than the invitation which he sees in the starry sky, image of his future beatitude:

“When will it be my turn to leave? When will I plunge headlong into the mathematical Paradise? . . . How much longer must I remain bound to this dismal shore where my nostalgia has no wings save the compass, and my slow pencil scratches a few queries in the margin of my navigator’s log?” (*Présence*, 245)

“Weep for wonder! Weep for God!” (*Cantique*, 288)

“I know that the Joy exists!”<sup>1</sup>

“Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” [Apoc. 19:9]

<sup>1</sup> *Ode jubilatoire pour le Centenaire de Dante.*

**1**

Beatific union, that great sacrament of the wedding of God and His Church, of which marriage is the fruitful and sacred image.

*Sophie*, 89

**2**

How many times have I been sorry to see St. John's descriptions in the Apocalypse taken literally. The author is continually warning us that they are there only as exercises for our minds. And how many times have I also been sorry not to see made available to believers (who after all are human beings in need of joy and consolation) those sublime chapters of St. Thomas which are the crown of his theology, in which he expounds the deific Vision.

*Discours*, 40

**3**

Consider that familiar sentiment which sums up the passionate yearning of a whole group of pious souls: "What a sorry thing the earth is when I consider the heavens!" To this group I would like to propose its converse: "How magnificent heaven must be to have such an earth for its introduction and anteroom!" And indeed faith and Scripture provide us with many insights into the future abode of our bliss which present-day preaching is perhaps guilty of overlooking.

*Discours*, 39

**4**

The great reality is that longing for joy and happiness which is not satisfied in this life. It has the clear-cut, spon-

taneous, and profound quality of a need, and we have no more reason not to trust it than not to trust the appetite which tells us we must eat.

From this source flows all of Christianity; the pagan sees no pathway between God and Man, and despairs, as is natural, but the Christian has a draft from God signed with the blood of Jesus Christ; he has definite rights, a belief, and a trust.

There is no longer anything but Being, there is nothing which can resist this summons from the perfect to the imperfect which we call Love.

All things die, but they die in God, like a child breathing his last on the breast of the beloved Father who holds him in His arms. In such a death there is joy.

*Toi, 29*

## 5

### *The Great Day of Reconciliation*

When man's earthly role is over, so also will be the earthly role of Nature. When Humanity has been reconciled with itself and forms a single whole throughout the continuity of its duration, so will it be with the Creation, whose meaning will not be fully clear until it is complete.

The day will come when the reign of apparent chance (what the Preacher calls vanity), of corruption, of violence, of cruel necessity, and also of mystery, of secret suggestion, of the figure of speech and the indirect allusion, will be at an end, when the Source will have rejoined the totality of its consequences down to the very last one, and when the whole Creation, unified in time and space, will offer its Creator, in the sacrament of the figure Twelve and the vision of its Cause, the full revelation of its meaning! *Dies illa*, this will no longer mean day of Wrath, day of judgment, but the day of reconciliation! Between the Creator and His work there will be a

covenant without end which St. John describes as a wedding. "You would call, and I would answer you; you would esteem the work of your hands." [Job 14:15]

*Apocalypse*, 190

## 6

### *Thoughts Turned Toward Eternity*

The sea is something which is healthful and necessary to our physical well-being. Are not excursions organized every year to allow city dwellers to breathe this free and invigorating air? Why, then, would it not be permissible to organize from time to time a little expedition in the direction of eternity, whose climate, after all, should not be too rarefied for Christian lungs? For how could we have that desire to sing, which St. Paul saw as the sign of a clear conscience, if we did not hear deep within ourselves the prompting murmur of that ocean where the verses of the Bible break one over the other, like giant waves endlessly stirred and lifted by the breath of the Holy Spirit?

*Sophie*, 220

## 7

No! The living soul will not remain forever the prisoner of death: unable to bear it any longer, in the end it will rise up, and out of the violence of its longing it will utter the cry of the Psalm of the Epiphany: "Let us throw down the yoke; let us break the bonds."

In a frenzy of trust and despair the living soul will rush blindly, without feet, without hands, toward the excruciating light and toward eternity—run like a little baby whose crying must be stilled.

*Corr. Suarès*, 51

## 8

*Longing for Heaven*

When care and study have darkened the spirit, I wander on the shores of the starry Heavens and I converse with these points without number which rise from out of the Infinite to lap my feet, wave after wave. Glorious populations! Riches which in filling our hearts to the brim serve only to whet their desire!

When will it be my turn to leave? When will I plunge headlong into the mathematical Paradise? When, yoking my impulse to these giant intersecting forces, will I embark at last on this intellectual Sea and fix a steady course toward these constellations ranged above me which hold their algebraic tower poised in the blackness? In vain you try to dissuade me by speaking of billions of light years and of that Infinite multiplied by Eternity which surrounds me on all sides.

I swallow all your computations in a single draught. This is not something strange or fearful to me; this is where I belong, this is what I was born for, this is my home. Here at last is the deathless country where I know that finitude has been freed forever by distance. I have been granted unlimited entry into something at once populous and utterly deserted, a Sahara luminous in pitch blackness, made up of millions of grains of sand, and I know that over there lies my true native land. Be it bottomless void or infinite number, both are to the measure of my desire. How much longer must I remain bound to this dismal shore where my nostalgia has no wings save the compass, and my slow pencil scratches a few queries in the margin of my navigator's log?

*Présence*, 244

## 9

Christians are instructed to desire heaven, and this desire, like any other, should involve not only the mind but

the whole person, which is made up of the soul together with the body. We must desire God whom the *Pater Noster* tells us is in heaven, and accordingly we must also desire Heaven which is His dwelling place, a certain sphere common to us both. "Where I am," says St. John, "there also shall my servant be." But how can we truly desire from the bottom of our hearts and bowels, even with the help of Grace which does not contradict nature but brings it to perfection, something of which we cannot form an idea, let alone a concrete image? This was the motive of the Eternal Wisdom which, having itself become flesh, has spoken to us only in parables, not availing itself of reason, but teaching us the language of those things around us which from the day of their creation have never ceased to speak.

*Positions I*, 172

## 10

It is a great blessing for a man to have had the opportunity to try his strength against eternity.

*Apocalypse*, 206

## 11

### *Our Election Is God's Mystery*

Divine grace works in such an inscrutable way ("two women will be grinding at the millstone, one will be taken, and one will be left" [Matt. 24:41]) that it could give a few lessons to chance and the thunderbolt! And we remember the Parable of the Marriage Feast in which the king, angry at all these distinguished people who refuse his invitation, sends his servants to the subway exits and the doors of factories and department stores to force people to attend, to collect indiscriminately whoever comes along.

*Apocalypse*, 33

## 12

### *Free Gift*

Let us note first of all that the happiness which the Blessed, redeemed by the blood of Christ, will enjoy in heaven, and which will endow them with some version of the divine powers, is not natural but supernatural; that between our nature and His there is a relation not of necessity, but of love. This is not the result of Justice, but of Grace.

*Positions II, 92*

## 13

Between our works and the eternal weight of glory there is a fundamental disproportion, a difference not only of degree but of kind. We can no more earn the kingdom of heaven than a road worker by breaking rock can earn the kingdom of France. Naturally, where no claim is in force, a covenant is possible. There is nothing to prevent God from establishing a conventional relationship between our deeds and His mercy. If we will, we can have all the advantages on our side. But naturally, again, the Lord will not allow His mercy to be confined by any covenant: "Have I not a right to do what I choose?" it is written in the Parable of the Laborers. [Cf. Matt. 20:1-15] "Or art thou envious because I am generous?"

The kiss<sup>2</sup> is gratuitous. Nothing can change the sacred quality of the kiss which is by definition gratuitous. This does not prevent there being *a posteriori*, in the eyes of the angels, in the eyes of the angelic intelligence, a sort of nexus between the old man and the new man, between the earthly man and the heavenly man, as it is expressed in Corinthians [I Cor. 15:48], between Saul the Pharisee and Paul the Apostle, nor

<sup>2</sup> That is, grace.

does it prevent God from continually resisting the temptation to have on His heart as much virtue as is rightfully His.

*Cantique*, 454

## 14

### *To Answer Christ's Call*

Arise, we must get up, and leave this dull stupor; we must leave our habits, we must leave our bodies! Above all, we must not neglect our lamps,<sup>3</sup> for if we do not have this glimmer, however faint it may be, to light our way, what will we do?—how will we see, I do not say the face but the feet of that fearful and beautiful person who comes to us in the night and who says He is our bridegroom, and how will He, in turn, be able to find us out? How will He see us? The electricity is no longer functioning. We no longer have anything to dispel the darkness but what we hold in our hands and refuel with our souls.

*Apocalypse*, 375

## 15

### *Meeting God*

The body must perform its own little task of disintegration until nothing remains but the mineral framework. It will have all the time it needs. But the soul, if you please, once disengaged from this costume whose sleeves are removed one by one, what does it do? What does it become?

The Church tells us that it comes immediately into the presence of God, that it is judged as if by its own weight with a hydrostatic precision, and that it finds its level of justification or condemnation. Such words come easily, but make the ink congeal in the tip of my pen.

My God, You know that I have a boundless desire to see You, and that I also have a horrible dread! "Who will hold

<sup>3</sup> An allusion to the parable of the Ten Virgins: Matthew 25:1–13.

me up?" says the Psalmist. How am I equipped, how am I framed to face the terrible experience of enduring Your presence? We cannot shed our skin in a day. How, stripped of armor and of body, will I swallow all this newness and vastness which is thrust upon me all at once, and this intolerable assault of the Absolute on my limitations?

*Epée*, 145

## 16

### *Flight of the Soul*

And then comes the moment of final separation, of the second death, when the soul, victorious at last, in an ecstasy of indignation, tears its garment from top to bottom and shrugs off this dead husk which until now has been fastened to its limbs. The sword has burst forth from its sheath! "The earthly man," that shabby garment which has been patiently detached and destroyed and from which we have emerged layer by layer, like an insect half out of his chrysalis, has given way in one or two places. Suspended, screaming, torn between this double pull of heaven and earth, the soul abandons its shell to the claws of Potiphar, and like that aquatic fly which uses its castoff skin as a raft, now strengthened, fortified, finally takes its flight toward the sun.

*Epée*, 187

## 17

### *Christ Delivers Us from Evil*

"He has led captivity captive,"<sup>4</sup> and like Samson who bore on his shoulders the gates of Gaza, He has left below those other broken gates which have not prevailed against Him. [Matt. 16:18] He conveys with Him to heaven those very obstacles of matter and flesh which held us prisoner, and which inhibited our vision and our movement. It is matter which was made to be penetrated, dominated, and utilized by

<sup>4</sup> Christ in His Ascension.

spirit, and not spirit, inversely, which submits unwillingly to this temporary outrage.

*Poète*, 166

## 18

### *The Soul Relieved of the Body's Weight*

Our heart has stopped and here at last is what has happened to us: our cross has been lifted from our shoulders and lies there on the ground. For now it is undone until the day of Resurrection, when we must again put on this armature, burdensome or buoyant, opaque or radiant: that secret agreement which our soul had plotted with the body, that machine for manufacturing the self to whose conditions we have had to submit and whose possibilities we have had to exploit all our lives, the heritage of our parents and the argument of Providence, a subtle master of invitation and denial. Now we are rid forever of this sly and unreliable servant, this demanding, stubborn, and dishonest partner, now grimly forbearing, now ridiculously rebellious. But for his part, if Corpus could speak, he would have something to say to us. We have given him green apples to swallow, as he uncouthly puts it.

*Poète*, 215

## 19

### *The True Faces of the Children of God*

*Vita mutatur, non tollitur.*<sup>5</sup>

Our life is changed, it is not taken away. It is not enough to say that it is restored to its most characteristic and essential form. You have noticed that in the lives of those we love there are moments when they seem to us to be "themselves," when they express the best that is in them: these are the moments we like to remember. These are the moments

<sup>5</sup> Preface to the Mass for the Dead.

when they are more nearly "children of God," when they come closer to realizing the intention of the heavenly Father in calling them into existence. Well, we may imagine that the future life, which Our Lord described as a clarification, will be that of a person utterly illuminated by his soul. The Apocalypse tells us that "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." [7:17; 21:4]

It is not only tears that He will wipe away, but also whatever there is in us that is obscure, accidental, irrelevant, profane, and evil, leaving only understanding, love, good will, light, and fragrance. We will be washed from head to foot like a little child who is given his bath, who is soaped and wiped dry with infinite care.

*Contacts*, 47

## 20

### *Our Pains Rewarded*

The hour is now come for the marriage feast spoken of in the Gospel, the prodigious arrival of a human menagerie, this herd which, whether or not it is willing, the Angels have come to collect by the wayside in wagonsful. Just as the martyrs are said to take into the next world the glorious stigmata of their sacrifice, so all these legions of the sick, and I do not mean only in body but in heart and in spirit, will be seen proudly flourishing their bandages and their orthopedic appliances!

*Cantique*, 190

## 21

The blind must thank their blindness that they now can see, the tubercular must thank their cough that they now can play the trumpet, the lame must thank their wooden leg that they now can dance, can dance like . . . the hills! For it is not venison and caviar and tarts as big as wagon wheels

and wine by the jeroboam which will be served at the prodigious table of the Infinite, but movement, only movement, this special kind of movement, this living and lived and knowing ecstasy which each will assume like a garment! “Walk bravely in My presence, and be perfect.”

*Cantique*, 191

## 22

### *Preservation of Our Faculties*

Some theologians regard the soul that has been separated from the body as divested of everything that connects it to the material conditions of this life, including even memory. What do they make of that statement in the Apocalypse that our works follow us? Where is remorse, with its biting precision, if there is no memory? And where the means of our purgation, or the “crown” of our sanctity?

In the story of the Rich Man of the Gospel [Cf. Luke 16:19–31], we see Lazarus’ patron retain in the next world sensitivity, memory, speech, desire, thirst, and concern for his family. Will we be in any way diminished in our being, in our personality and in our knowledge by being profoundly drawn to the heart of our Cause, to that living and life-giving principle? “Then I shall know,” says the Apostle, “even as I have been known.” [I Cor. 13:12]

*Emmaüs*, 130

## 23

### *Invasion of the Divine Life*

Lo, it is at hand; after endless meanderings it is upon us at last, the invasion of this torrent of joy! It was released at the command of Moses’ staff, the treasure of living water. [Cf. Numbers 20:6] The very floodgate of the deep has given way.

This is the bottomless well of the void where we may quench our thirst. On all sides may be heard the booming

thunder of these cataracts exploring its infinite depths. “Lo, I will spread prosperity over her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent.” [Isaia 66:12] It is not that great body of water mentioned in Ecclesiastes—one of those rivers like the Bekong or the Nile which supplies a vast irrigation system—no, it is an inexorable sea which lifts, floods, and submerges everything.

*Poète*, 229

## 24

“But where the offense has abounded, grace has abounded yet more.” [Rom. 5:20] It submerges all, floods all, lifts all, cleanses all, removes all stain.

*Poète*, 230

## 25

O Infinite, there is nothing in my heart tight enough to hold you!

*Ev. Isaïe*, 97

## 26

### We Will Be Like Gods

From enslavement to sin, the false freedom which St. Peter calls a “cloak for malice” [I Pet. 2:16], from this subjection to space and external reality, we advance to enlightened adoption, to insight, to active, substantial, and total union with the true generative principle in the bosom of the Trinity. We are no longer with the effects, we are with the Cause. We are no longer with the clay earth, we are with those two omnipresent hands of the divine Potter. We are no longer with time, we are with the fount of life, we are with Him who overcame the World.

In the person of our leaders, we have exhausted all the worst that death could do to us, and from now on we can

cry with the Apostle, "Where is it, this vaunted sting?" [Cf. I Cor. 15:54-55] It is no more; death is forever "swallowed up in victory."

The Kingdom of Heaven is promised to us not as subjects, but as rulers, as thrones on which Christians who are one with Christ will sit in judgment; that is, we will exercise an intelligent power, based on the authority of a living text.

*Poète*, 166

## 27

### *Participation in the Nature and Activity of God*

Henceforth there will no longer be any of God's works, or any action of the divine will in which we do not participate, to which we are not linked in the past, in the present, in the future, and in eternity, by a type of profound understanding and by deep and intimate union. Through understanding our own origin, we will understand how God goes about creating and sustaining all things. We will share in each of His creative acts, and feel its effect on our very substance, that is, on the particular purpose that we fulfill. There is not one of these initiatives, not one of these morning visitations mentioned by the Psalmist, in which we are not involved.

*Poète*, 163

## 28

### *The Soul Embraces the Divine Will*

We know that after death the soul will be brought face to face with God, and enabled to understand and embrace the divine will, according to that particular purpose which fathered it in true conformity with and in full awareness and intelligent possession of its Master and its Servant, the divine model, and to work and pattern itself faithfully and lovingly after Him. Hence that remarkable *amoeba proteus* which Paul Vignon tells us about, that blob of protoplasm which

fashions for itself, at will, legs with which to travel and antennae with which to see and apprehend.

From now on there is not a particle of the soul's vision or its liberty which does not serve its obedience; this is why it is compared to that tongue of fire quickened by the spirit which comes into being as a result of vibration. "He makes . . . his ministers a flame of fire." [Heb. 1:7] To express this intimate dialogue between the intelligent and articulate flame and the divine Word, the Psalmist employs this image: "The voice of the Lord strikes fiery flames." [28:7]

*Poète*, 168

## 29

In disembodied souls, the attraction of the beloved Being does not operate, as the pantheists imagine, by means of a dissolution ending in a fusion, but on the contrary, by means of a confirmation of the delightful disparity, by a full and enlightened preservation of the form of the individual will, our love depending on the clarity of that particular image of the supreme Goodness in which God created us and which underlies our being.

*Cantique*, 448

## 30

### *Beatific Vision*

"Then I shall know even as I have been known," says the Apostle. [I Cor. 13:12] Then shall we see, as unity is seen in variety, the essential rhythm of that movement which is my soul, that measure which is my self. We will not only see it, we will be it, we will present ourselves in the fullness of freedom and knowledge and in the purity of a perfect love. From the bosom of the Lamb we will borrow our individuality, in order to have something to give to Him. In this bitter mortal existence the most poignant joys revealed to our

nature are those which attend the creation of a soul by the joining of two bodies. Alas, they are but the lowly image of that substantial embrace when the soul, having learned its name and purpose, will surrender itself with a word, will inhale and exhale itself in succession. O continuation of our heart, unutterable word! O dance divine!

All carnal possession is of limited span and duration; what are its transports compared to this royal wedding? "You have made your people feel hardships; you have given us stupefying wine." [Psalm 59:5] What is the seizing of an empire or of a woman's body in a ruthless embrace in comparison with this divine ravishment, like lime seizing sand, and what death (death, our very precious inheritance) grants us in the end so perfect a sacrifice, so generous a restoration, so fatherly and so loving a gift? Such is the reward promised to all the righteous, and this unprecedented wage which amazes the workers of the parable.

But in reality the dowry of each soul will differ from the next, like the will of which it is the embodiment, the purpose that gave it birth, and the one that gave it glory.

*Art poétique*, 181

## 31

### *Vision of the Divine Essence*

We will contemplate the first Cause of everything in us that has meaning. With an intelligence so pure and so enlightened that it will have the immediacy of sensation, with an expenditure of our whole being, with a will as swift and subtle as the fiery flame, we will embrace every divine gesture, and will share in the creation of all that is created according to its kind, as far as the eye can see. It is thus, to employ an imperfect image, that powerful music seizes us, sweeps us away, and carries us along with it; drawing us utterly into this world which it creates, it imposes on us its tempo, its rhythm, and its melody, and compels us to con-

tribute to that booming ocean of joy which perpetually rises and falls around it. Our blessed destiny is a perfect blending of our will with the divine activity, a participation in this supreme council, this timeless conversation carried on by the Three Persons.

We will be at the source; like St. John we will have our ear pressed to the divine heart, in that place vacated by Lucifer, to which the Prophet refers when he speaks of that throne once occupied by the King of Tyre "in the heart of the sea." And indeed, we will be at the center, at the heart of this vast movement, of this ebb and flow, of these universal tides of longing and of grace. We will be with the Love that invites all things to itself, and it is only then that we will fully understand the Lord's promise: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself."

*Poète*, 164

## 32

One look from the crucified Christ is enough to place all paradise within reach of a thief. It is enough to ordain Mary and through her, the whole Catholic Church, in her office of universal motherhood. Let us bear in mind what theology tells us about the direct confrontation, the deific vision which endows us with divinity and ushers us into the very bosom of the Trinity.

Abraham, father of his people, was told to lift up his eyes and see. [Cf. Gen. 13:14] And Job: "I had heard of you by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen you." [42:5]

We see Him and He sees us with that life-giving eye: *Ego, ego sum; ego vidi!* And it is with our eyes that we place before Him the only thing that belongs to us, namely our imperfection. ("Your eyes have seen my actions" [Psalm 138:16]), the thing He needed and which inspired this particular gradation of His mercy, this gift which we borrow at the source of the Seven eyes. It is from the eye of the absolute

Being that we draw permanence for this relative being which we are.

*Apocalypse*, 224

### 33

What we are talking about is that essential eye which the Sermon on the Mount tells us enables the clean of heart to see God simply by looking at Him. It is by cleansing it, saturating it with Grace, and purging it of congestion that one endows this life-giving heart with sight. Thus in Ezekiel's vision of the divine beasts, it is eyesight alone that endows them with movement, speech, and song.

*Apocalypse*, 378

### 34

#### *At the Fount of Life*

We are clothed from head to foot in the glory of God, we are an animate force of God, a word of God at work! Something precious, inestimable, irreplaceable, of which we must keep hold! There is only one way to give off light and that is to inhale life.

*Apocalypse*, 265

### 35

#### *Transparence of the Souls*

The dead will be "as transparent as glass, as magnificent as gold," in the words of St. Gregory. We know only too well how impenetrable, during their lives, were those whom we love the most. We were obliged to take them by surprise, to guess them out. They frequently acted for complex motives which they themselves would have had trouble explaining. Our affection collided with these superficial de-

fenses. We were powerless to clasp to our hearts what they themselves were powerless to give.

After death, on the other hand, everything becomes clear, everything becomes legible and transparent. What St. James calls the shadows of alteration [Cf. St. James 1:17], this constant and misleading variation, will have disappeared. We will take in our loved ones in a single glance, in a single draught, in a single spiritual inhalation.

*Contacts*, 48

## 36

### *The Splendor of Souls*

When St. Gregory writes that the souls will be "magnificent as gold," he means that they will radiate in all directions that truth which pervades them and which has made them free. On earth all things are evaluated according to their worth in gold; this is what constitutes what we call their exchange value. Similarly, death, like a blessed alchemist, transmutes everything in us that was good, but transitory, into a fixed and permanent value. Death lives by gold and swears by gold; he awakens in our hearts the dormant gold, that is, the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. He touches us with his wonder-working fingers, he turns our resignation and our good will into gold, and his figure casts a gentle glow over that path which we still must travel and that threshold which he has already crossed.

*Contacts*, 48

## 37

### *Understanding, Knowledge*

For the glorified creature, totally illumined by the Holy Spirit, ignorance is at an end. Everything relates to God; everything is part of His design.

*Epée*, 260

### 38

In the next life, when we will be permitted to dive into the text and read it at sight, we will clarify it, we will translate it in all its force and vigor, each in his own idiom. We will know by the same process as the one by which we exist; that is, no longer by means of an interpretation of signs, but directly, by means of a certain expansion, adjustment, inhalation, and exhalation of our whole being, transmitting a message, a code, around us like a star flashing signals.

There will no longer be anything to hide us from view. Everything in us will have become luminous, vibrant, and legible. And in the same manner our knowledge of other, co-existing spirits, will be full and direct, thanks to that suspension of the being (of which, as we have seen, this physical vibration is the image) on which every sensation will be registered. Not only will we be part of this numberless body of all our brothers in Christ, as the word (with the accent and the comma) is part of the sentence, but we will also know how to show them that, though separate in the sight of God, in a certain sense we exist only through them and they exist only through us. Not the slightest variation can be introduced into their essential and spiritual make-up without having an immediate effect on our own. Our fundamental diversity will publish joyously around us an invitation to unity. Around His throne we will all take part in a conversation without end. On all sides cause will speak directly to Cause, and will be understood.

*Poète, 213*

### 39

Our soul, spreading her wings to the measure of her inspiration, invents the outward rendering of that rhythm which she draws up from the depths of her own nature. She

hears herself talking to God, and presently the powerful welling up of a pure and serene thought succeeds this initial inarticulateness.

Let us entrust this musical angel within us with the responsibility of extending the range, of developing around the altar the eulogy and the praise, and providing this eternity which is our natural and acquired habitat with the inexhaustible metaphor of time.

*Poète*, 184

## 40

### *Vision of Heaven*

I am a student of a world where form no longer exists and where the senses in their superficial state no longer have anything on which to work.

Here everything is reduced to one dimension and to the musical modification of this dimension which we call Time. For me it is Time which is the basis of all order and composition, which has become legible to my eyes by means of the innumerable landmarks provided for me, just as a musical score becomes legible to the inner ear of the performer by means of those symbols crowded in apparent disorder but which provide the signatures of the successive staves.

*Présence*, 301, 302

## 41

Here space has been transformed into a statistic. There is no longer any continuity or expanse, but only a sparkling of correspondences, a population of mathematical beings engaged in their reciprocal evaluation, related by comparisons of speed or proximity and by basic proportions which we express on paper in terms of weight and mass.

*Présence*, 304

## 42

*The Light of Charity*

"Then your light shall break forth like the dawn." [Isaia 58:8] Not like the inconstant light which illumines our night . . . your souls will be splendors as diverse as the motives that called them into being; that is why they are compared to the stars, these numberless explorers of the Infinite . . . it is light, infinitely more delicate than all the organs of perception, which has become the organ of charity, of this species of touch, of sensation, of fraternal communication within the hive which enables them to give, and not just to give, but to give themselves.

*Poète*, 176

## 43

*Our White Garments*

Those white garments we have heard about, we know what they are! White means light: "The whiteness of eternal light," says the morning litany. This is the stuff of our baptismal gown, the fabric which the angels wear clasped about their breasts with a girdle of gold. This is the cloth which heaven supplies to the wardrobe of the Holy Father. This is the linen closet where we would like to plunge our arms and draw forth those noble fabrics with which we would clothe ourselves in folds of glory!

"Clothed with majesty and glory, robed in light" [Psalm 103:1-2], like the alb worn by newly ordained priests: clothed with that light which is speech, strength, severity, that garment which we fashion to cling to us like a skin, like a mane, like a magnetic field: "Strip off the old man with his deeds and put on the new, one that is being renewed unto perfect knowledge according to the image of his Creator." [Col. 3:9-10] Our glorified body represents the collision of

that light within, that creative purpose which we abuse, with the one that we inhale in great lungfuls from without.

*Apocalypse*, 377

## 44

### *The Glory of the Blessed*

Glory does not only shine forth, it is not only in us and above us as a triumphant source of light, expression, endurance, and movement, it is also something subtly and substantially wedded to the very basis of our mass. It is "weight" according to that idea which St. Paul offers to our consideration: "For our present light affliction, which is for the moment, prepares for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure." [II Cor. 4:17]

Weight, in us, is a property much more subtle, more abstract, more intrinsic than all the other perceptible accidents. It is the center of our unity, the basis of our selfhood, the soul of our individuality. And what is more remarkable is that, while to all appearances so intimately and inseparably bound to the creature himself that it seems to be a measure of his size, proportion, and value, nevertheless the law of gravity informs us that it is merely the result of a traction or "pull" exerted by some outside force.

At every moment we are being weighed against the whole universe whose invisible pull preserves our individual density and unity; not for a second do we escape the meticulous scales of Justice, those scales by which King Balthazar was once found wanting. It is this weight which smothers, oppresses, and dismembers the damned and keeps the blessed in their proper place in the bosom of eternal grace. Here as everywhere else, the measure of God seizes the measure of man in order to enrich and multiply it. It is a little like Pascal's principle of hydrostatics.

*Poète*, 189

## 45

### *Living Stones*

It is a commonplace of ecclesiastical rhetoric to speak of the Blessed as the very materials of which the City of God is built; whether we mean those hewn blocks which are the martyrs, or those unfinished nuggets which are the Innocents, or those other stones which have long been used, polished, and wrought. Here there is no eye which may not see, nor tongue which may not respond to the Word, nor anything capable of eternity which may not partake of the living God.

In heaven, I daresay weight will prevail over all, for as St. Paul says, "our present light affliction . . . prepares for us an eternal weight of glory." This weight, this constant reckoning of justness and justice, this absorption, this acquisition of Grace by nature for our eternal dower, will be like a sense that is an inherent part of us, a constant power of gravitation and of flight, a source of freedom, an infinitely delicate instrument for the evaluation of the distance, size, and quality of all that advances or retreats toward or away from us. Is it not written in the Book of Wisdom that God has disposed all things by measure and number and weight? [11:20] Thus the soul too must make use of the specific weight at her disposal that she may be aware of her movements from within and from without.

*Apocalypse*, 203

## 46

### *Heavenly Transactions*

Who could believe that heavenly universe which awaits us to be less strongly and skillfully organized than this vale of tears?

The garden into which we are admitted is given over not only to the irresistible obligations of love, but to the in-

exhaustible discoveries of liberty and the triumphal wedding of the One and the Many.

I have spoken of this new sense of weight with which we will be endowed. I wonder whether I ought not add another: Value. Each of us is like a piece of money, an accredited stock which is capable of redeeming all the rest. Dizzy transactions! When I search the starry sky, I seem to see one vast bank engaged in a monumental transaction of credit. No unemployed money, no false economy here; everything is in constant use. Everything is being bought and sold. I purchase not only with my own value but also with the inexhaustible credit granted me by faith, which enables me to satisfy in full my infinite creditor, and to render to God the things that are God's.

This might be a way of explaining that rather strange parable of the Gospel concerning the lost drachma. A woman, after turning her house inside out, finds a penny—one would not think this an occasion for great rejoicing. And yet this woman, in whom I see a symbol of Mary and the Church, when she has recovered this infinitesimal sum, is literally beside herself. She wakes up the neighborhood. She flourishes the wretched copper aloft. "Rejoice with me," she cries.

One would think that now there is nothing which is not within her means, that she is now in a position to purchase this whole world, not to speak of the next. And so she is! For this coin which bears on one side the likeness of some man is stamped on the other with the seal of God.

*Rose, 202*

## 47

### *The New Name*

Such is this new name mentioned in the Bible, this proper name by which we have been called unto eternal life, this unutterable name which always remains a secret between

the Creator and us, and which is imparted to no other. To learn this name is to understand our own nature, to be sustained by our own *raison d'être*. Like a word made up of vowels and consonants, our soul draws from God with each breath the fullness of its resonance. Thus, for the soul, birth will be identical with understanding, with a fully illuminated awareness.

*Art poétique*, 180

## 48

### *Our Activity in Heaven*

"My Father works even until now, and I work." [John 5:17] And, similarly, if we are one with Christ, our food will be not only to know the will of the Father, but to do it. Thus we see how childish and inadequate is that common conception expressed by artists and poets in a naïve or delightful style, the notion that the state of the blessed is purely contemplative, a state of emptiness. All these saints, all these heroes, all these great workers, these movers of heaven and earth, what? Are they to do nothing but stroll about, eat and drink (spiritually, of course), make music, and be waited upon?

How vastly I prefer the remark of little Thérèse, "I will spend my time in heaven doing good on earth."

But why just on earth, I pray, dear sister? That ten-stringed psalmist's harp which I see in your hands is not just a musical instrument but a symbol of communication and action. Modern industry has shown us all that can be done with fibers. And the Blessed Virgin herself in highest heaven, what does she do but forever serve? *Ecce ancilla Domini*. And so with all the saints invoked—not vainly, I imagine—by our litanies!

*Cantique*, 209

## 49

*To Inhale God*

What will the saints do in Paradise, you ask, and I reply that they will be engaged in inhaling God, and God will be engaged in inhaling them. He will inhale their souls, letting them pass into Himself, and they in turn will inhale His Spirit, letting it pass into themselves. The Father lives the lives of His children, and His children live the life of their Father. "That all may be one, even as thou, Father, in me and I in thee." [John 17:21] *Ego, ego vivo!* says the Lord.

Just as the life-giving gift of oxygen kindles in us intelligence and will, so the gift of God, that mysterious investment of divinity, that spiritual and voluntary embrace of the creative principle, will kindle in us understanding and love, the love of our Maker and the love of all these indispensable brothers around us with whom we are One breath and with whom—universal, Catholic—we will commune every time we fill our lungs.

*Trois figures*, 99

## 50

*Our Duty of Praise*

Our occupation in eternity will be the fulfilling of our role in the performance of the Divine Office, the maintenance of our everchanging equilibrium in the vast loving network of all our brothers, the raising of our voice in the ineffable moan of Love!

*Art poétique*, 192

## 51

*Singers in the Light*

In the presence of its Author, the soul experiences a sort of explosion, releasing, discharging, extrapolating every-

thing with which life has burdened its inner consciousness, its inner form. That self-made consciousness will henceforth be irresistibly forced from its testimony. "I have brought out fire from your midst which will devour you," says Ezechiel [28:18], referring to the damned. It will devour the damned in the sense that the Holy Spirit, in reclaiming from them that breath which first gave them life, will encounter an irreducible obstacle, something which cannot be assimilated.

But as for the souls of the blessed, those who still have sin to expiate, bad workmanship to correct, it will be a healing by fire: fire, brought carefully to bear on something reduced from obstacle to fuel, will provide for their needs. As for the purified souls, when they have adjusted their pitch, they will begin to sing in the light.

*Cantique, 447*

## 52

### *The Language of the Blessed*

While our earthly existence is comparable to a broken and barbarous language, our life in God will be like poetry of the most exquisite felicity. For the word, as we have seen, is not just the sign of a certain state of sensibility; it is the measure of the effort we must make to form it, or, rather, to be formed by it. The poet, who has mastery over all words and the art of employing them, has the skill to arouse in us through a clever arrangement of the objects they represent, a mental state which is harmonious and intense, strong and true. But then we will all be "poets," composers of ourselves. This acute sense of our intrinsic prosody, the impossibility of escaping our own admirable meter will then be conferred on us directly without the accidental and empirical complement of spoken language.

*Art poétique, 190*

## 53

*The Music of the Souls*

"Arise, my beloved, let me hear your voice," as I have taught you to hear mine, "for your voice is sweet." The soul has become pure praise and the "daughter of song," Ecclesiastes' phrase [12:4] for that full-throated and melodious *sostenato*, or neume (*pneuma*),<sup>6</sup> the need for which was communicated to her by night. She has been utterly transformed into a musical instrument; she no longer holds the harp in her hands; she is the harp. In herself she finds the scale and, from octave to octave, the way to ascend with infinite variations from the lowest note to the highest. "Awake, O my soul; awake, lyre and harp!" [Psalms 56:9] It is not without reason that we speak of a man or a musical instrument as "true."

*Poète*, 177

## 54

It is our very captivity which has become the theme of our rejoicing. It is our bonds which have become our wings, and our bewildered soul, like a prisoner playing happily with his chains, perceives to her delight the utter impossibility of escaping the divine joy. We shoot toward heaven like an arrow, we pounce down on our prey like an eagle, like a streak of lightning. O arpeggio, O unfurling of mighty wings! O full acceleration of power! O true and mighty commandment, O radiant liberty of all that now, far from ground, passes into the realm of air! All space is ours to erase triumphantly with the sign of the cross!

*Poète*, 183

## 55

Our whole life will be a presentation of ourselves to God in a sort of recitative without end. Free at last of its

\* Neume: sequence of notes sung to one syllable in plain chant.

refractory element, the soul has begun to celebrate its being. Having attained justice and justness, having arrived at the true limit imposed by the law of its individual nature, it has become light. It diffuses itself abroad, it declares its own value, it broadcasts its spiritual weight in all directions, it hears itself pronouncing the name of God in its very own voice with an intonation that is eternal!

By means of this sound and light which it produces, the soul discovers its own identity. It realizes itself fully in the process of uttering its own name. It understands, it confirms the fact that it may draw indefinitely on its *raison d'être* which is inexhaustible because it is none other than the will of God working in it and through it.

*Cantique*, 449

## 56

### *The Communion of the Blessed*

It is through our weight that we will realize our own value in relation to God, and it is through the dance that, moved to the most profound, subtle, and active center of our gravity, to the very marrow of our bones, we will realize ourselves in a constant and ingenious improvisation with our brothers. Then we will seize them as they will seize us, and we will lead them, and we will joyously unite with them in a flaming pirouette. "For in Him we live," St. Paul has said, "and move and have our being." [Acts 17:28]

*Cantique*, 191

## 57

The soul feels this total power, the initial shock not of God, who is an unchanging act, but of the mysterious diversity which simultaneously begets all the creatures bound together by the blessed vision. The soul understands that she alone can never exhaust the gratitude she feels and that she needs the help of all other spirits in order to express it. Just as

she sees in the particular act of love which created her the same necessity that implied the creation of other, complementary spirits, so she needs their voices that she may raise her own. She sees in her divine origin that of all the other souls joined to him by a common love. She needs them all, all have their place in the economy of her well-being, from the Virgin and the greatest of the Angels down to the tiniest baby whom the midwife scarcely has had time to baptize.

*Art poétique*, 183

## 58

### *Reciprocal Communication of the Blessed*

Not only do the souls communicate with each other through God, but they carry on a direct communication among themselves. Just as body perceives body, and matter apprehends matter, so spirit discerns spirit.<sup>7</sup>

There is a spiritual equivalent of space in which “distances” are measured no longer by physical remoteness but by harmonic intervals. It is no longer through symbols but simply through their existence that the souls will communicate with one another.

*Art poétique*, 184

## 59

At no moment will I be permitted to withdraw my participation from the communion of the saints. At no moment will the divine Mercy and Justice be permitted to dispense with me or with anything whatever that is capable of bearing them witness.

*Emmaüs*, 131

<sup>7</sup> St. Gregory develops these ideas in his treatise, *De auro et vitro*. Cf. also the text of St. Paul, “The Lord will both bring to light the things hidden in darkness and make manifest the counsels of hearts.” [I Corinthians, 4:5]

**60***The Heavenly Banquet*

When the Holy Scriptures tell us that the citizens of the eternal Sabbath eat an invisible food, we may believe that this phrase corresponds to a reality; that it is not (as indeed nothing is in the Bible) a mere literary device. If really and truly we are asked to believe that the body and blood of Jesus Christ are both food and drink—not only nourishment for the spirit, but satisfaction for the appetite—if it is true that “Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God” [Matt. 4:4], how can we suppose that in the next world there will be nothing corresponding to Eucharistic communion and that we will not be provided with “the bread of angels”? In that world we will meet the naked realities of which the physical manifestations of this earth are but the poor shadow and image. This is why the “table” which establishes a level among the guests is singled out as one of the essential pieces of the sacred furnishings. It is situated in the North, which represents immutable fixity. And around this table is celebrated that eternal Passover which the Lord longed to eat with us, and the very thought of which consoles us amid our troubles. “I shall be content in your presence.” [Psalms 16:15]

*Poète*, 186

**61**

O trumpet which is both bread and wine! O first fruits of that inexpressible banquet where we are served the secret meaning of all that until then was but the pacifier of our physical senses! O marrow of all meat, sap of life, unblemished vintages! O sacred wine wrought by priceless fermentations!

*Ev. Isaïe*, 92

## 62

### *Multitude of the Blessed*

The Bible tells us that the Lord knows the number of His stars and of His sparrows and even the number of hairs on our heads. We have here such a variety of types, such a multiplicity of special cases, of personal experiences, and peculiar temperaments, that they confound classification. Even the old men who preside over the sifting of this human tide lose track of what they are doing. Who are they? asks one of them. All ages, all races, all places are represented; they come in abundance, new examples keep arriving in a steady stream.

But now the Prophet no longer speaks of a mark imprinted on their flesh, but of a robe which they have been given and have washed in the blood of the Lamb, the same blood which has nourished that victorious palm branch they bear in their hands. This is the *populus acquisitionis* which has been rescued from the gloom of the sea floor and the uncertainty of the surface. As in the ancient Temple, it is an influx which no longer recognizes any distinction between the inner and outer sanctuary. Nor is it any longer a case of setting up three tents, as St. Peter proposed on Mount Tabor. It is His own tabernacle whose shade the Lord promises to extend to all this multitude. "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob!" [Numbers 24:5]

*Apocalypse, 32*

## 63

### *Contact with the Earth*

There remains to be examined what intercourse the disembodied souls can have with material things and with the spirits of the living.

Man, like all creatures endowed with movement, acquires a direction and a meaning, a purpose and an end.

Having a soul, he is aware of this purpose, but separated from God in this life he can only judge by appearances, by time which holds him prisoner, and by the various parts of the external world with which he comes in contact.

But once separated from his body, he possesses in God alone the fixed point which determines his course, independent of perceptible landmarks and bearings. He sees God whole, and in the mere fact of his existence he fully understands his distinctive essence or formative purpose. The purpose, or power, of a man (in the same sense as we speak of the "power" of a machine) is directed toward an influence on external things; from this influence proceeds sensation and movement which are the image to which the influence gives rise. The creature who is cut off from the vision can only turn to the image.

*Art poétique*, 186

## 64

### *The Role of Mary*

Mary, in heaven, helped God draw up the plans of this new Jerusalem; she laid its foundations. She was there when He made the Creation out of nothing, when He fathered forth the light, when He quickened these vast circular orbits with His Law, when He balanced the deep!

*Apocalypse*, 191

## 65

### *Bliss*

There, in the sight of God, I will be all flame; in His presence I will borrow all light! In His light I will kindle not only light, my own light, but the full perfection of body and soul whose primer I have been lisping too long in this low place. I will awaken in the fullness of my name. I will awaken

in the fullness of my form, in the full awareness and the full mastery of my being.

*Emmaüs*, 134

## 66

Weep for wonder, weep for shame! Weep for joy!  
Weep for God! Weep for His mercy, weep for His power!  
Weep, weep, my beloved son! Weep for love, weep for joy!

*Cantique*, 288

## 67

Inhale me, O my God, and let me inhale You from end to end!

*J'aime*, 127



















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